Archivist's notes:

I'd like to extend my gratitude to everyone who has helped us in this 3-year-long hunt. Special thanks to @/f4nd0mz for providing most of the images. There are a few pieces missing - specifically chapter titles and images, but this is ultimately supplemental material. If you do have any of these, please contact me on Tumblr, my blog is **conarcoin**.

Please do not, under any circumstances, try to locate or contact the author of this work. They wrote this as a teenager 4 years ago and have no interest in being involved. Leave them alone. We are publishing this not for the purpose of reigniting long-settled harassment and drama, but for the purpose of media preservation and documentation of fandom history.

For historical context, please understand that to this day, there is no surviving evidence of any SMPLive member featured besides Carson having an issue with the fic. The vast majority of members involved actively joked about it or were reading it themselves.

and fuck callmecarson

PROLOGUE: LAST ONE STANDING

»»————- ☠ -————««

He wakes up splayed out on the floor.

His neck hurts.

Where was he?

...Skateboard. That's the first this that fills his head. Weird.

He blinks himself awake more. The more he blinks, the more fuzzy his head feels.

He was in bed, he thinks. He was in bed and then he wakes up here.

That was what happened, right?

His thigh aches. Probably fell on it wrong.

He can remember his name at least. It's Cooper, he remembers this the best- or, the least fuzzy.

Cooper sits up, mind empty. He looks around, massaging his temples. The room is varying degrees of purple, with a carpeted floor. A few couches are placed around the room. He looks up, and a purple banner with an odd white logo is scribbled over in black.

What's odd though, is the boy that's staring at him from outside the room, head peaked from the corner.

"...Excuse me? Hey, where- do you know where I am?"

The boy quickly draws his head back. Cooper goes to stand up, but his head fills with more fuzz. He clutches his head and sits back down, groaning in pain. The boy comes back, his head back from the corner.

"You- You woke up here like me, yeah?" His voice is soft.

Cooper nods. He feels queasy. The fuzz is getting to his mouth. It's dry, so dry, so are his eyes. If he could describe his condition right now, it would be "ass".

"Um- Who are you, huh?" The boy asks.

"Cooper." He replies.

"Travis," He replies, finally stepping away from the corner, his full self in the entrance of the room, "it's Travis."

"Alright Travis, can you tell me where the hell I am?" Cooper grimaces.

"Um- Looks like a convention hall to me. A big one. Ya know those… convention thingies? Yeah."

"I know what a convention hall is, dipshit." He bites back.

Travis looks cross for a brief second, but goes back to his original neutral, spacy expression.

“Alright- well, uh, maybe we should look for other people, Cooper.” Travis suggests.

Cooper agrees, standing up and scrunching his face up at the headache the comes with. He heads out of what he can deduce as a lounge room, following this Travis guy around in an empty convention hall.

Not creepy at all.

As he passes a closed room, from around the corner comes a group of three. Small boy in a white mask looks generally uncomfortable. Guy in a suit with a red tie looks like he’s on the verge of tears. He’s weirdly sweaty. Guy in a suit with a blue tie looks pissed off.

“Excuse- Excuse me, gentlemen, but uh, where the fuck are we?! Connor, we were just about to hit it big! That company needed us, and you just HAD to check out what was in the bushes!”

“Oh, don’t blame me Schlatt, those guys probably hates us from the start. Probably sent the hitman after us.”

“The hitman-?! Oh god, is he here too?!”

Cooper sighs.

“Can you both save the banter for later? God- My head hurts, I feel hungover, I’m in an empty convention hall with a bunch of fucking strangers, the last thing I need to hear is loud guy numbers one and two bickering about a fucking business deal!” Cooper hisses.

“Uh. What he said. You woke up here like us, right?” Travis asks.

Schlatt goes to open his mouth, but boy in mask stops him.

“Yeah. Funny thing is, they took three of us at the same time. From what I’ve seen, looks like everyone else got here separately. You can call me Ty. Schlatt,” He gestures to red tie man, “and Connor,” He gestures to blue tie man, “are Ultimate Businessman and Business Associate respectively. I’m the Ultimate Intern. I’m assuming you two have talents?”

“...What?” Cooper inquires, rubbing his temples again.

Despite the mask, Cooper can tell Ty is looking at him funny.

“Talents, dummy. The thing you’re the best at. Schlatt Co. is a very successful organization that they run, and that earned them their own titles. I’m just their intern. I get a keychain and everything.” Ty hums, taking from his hoodie pocket and jingling said keychain.

“Huh.” Cooper furrows his brow.

The first thing he thought of was skateboard.

“...Um. Ultimate- Ultimate Skateboarder.” Cooper stammers.

Travis thinks for a second, tongue pressed outside of his teeth as he stands hard in thought.

“...I dunno. Don’t think I got one. Oh- right. I’m Travis, this is Cooper.” He points to the blonde beside him.

“Pleasure meeting you two. Perhaps we can strike up a deal later when you aren’t busy. Would you be interested in a sponsorship, Mr. Cooper?” Schlatt offers.

Before Cooper can answer, Schlatt and his party walk off, Schlatt moving at a relatively slower pace than his other lackeys.

Still in general confusion, The pair press forward. Rounding the corner, they come to another locked room. Peeking inside, Cooper finds that this looks to be a computer room, with several PCs lined up as if it was a computer lab of sorts.

Cooper steps back and tries to jostle the handle of the room, but upon touching the knob, a shock runs through his body. He draws back in pain and yelps loudly, Travis turning to look at him with concern.

“Are- Are you alright? That sounded like a bad shock.” He asks, approaching the blonde.

Cooper grimaces and flexes his hand. Still functioning, at least.

“Damn thing shocked me.”

“You should be careful, then.” Rings a deeper voice from behind him.

Cooper spins around and looks up.

The man with dark hair and glasses smiles. Blonde hair with glasses shoves his hands into his tricolor jacket.

“Sorry- Didn’t want to startle you, uh. I’m Ted. This is..?”

“Oh. Carson. I’m Carson. Yeah.” Other tall guy responds.

“Alright, cool. Say, you guys got those Ultimate things?” Cooper asks, and Ted perks up.

“Oh! Yeah, I’m the Ultimate Commentator. Carson’s the Ultimate Comedian.” Ted gestures to Carson.

“I am the funny man.” Carson deadpans, and Travis laughs.

“Alright, well we’re gonna go look around some more. How many people do you think there are?” Cooper asks.

“Well, there’s those Schlatt Co. guys, uh, these two dudes named Ryan and Altrive, and…-“

Ted gets cut off by the sound of a speaker turning on, the convention hall buzzing with the static. Cooper’s head starts hurting again.

“Will everyone report to the main hall. Immediately.” The robotic voice hums.

The speakers shut off, and Carson looks hopeful, almost.

“That- that could be the cops. Come on.” The blonde heads off.

Ted follows after Carson, followed by Cooper and Travis as they round the corner. After walking for what, to Cooper, felt like forever, Carson perks up and stares ahead.

“Hey- The others. That’s… Definitely a bit of people.”

The group approaches, entering the main hall.

The hall itself was large and empty, stretching from one end of eternity to the next. The large space swallowed Cooper, and the metal plates covering the glass ceiling made the boy feel trapped. Like a bird in a cage, rattling his bars, he scoffs at the closed off windows. He blinks himself back to Earth, where everyone continued to talk over each other.

“I’m guessing you woke up here, too.”
“Bro, this sucks ass. I’m going home.”
“All the doors shocked me! What kinda hospitality is this?”
“I’ll call my lawyers, this isn’t funny.”
“This is kidnapping! Actual fucking kidnapping!”

“Cooper, you alright?” Travis stares into Cooper as the blonde unfurls his fingers from his hair.

“...Yeah. Sorry. Too noisy for me, man.” He grimaces. Travis nods.

“I can see you’re all wide awake.”

The speakers crackle to life once more, and the bright bulbs lining the hall all flicker to a dim orange. Out in front of the group marches a small figure, its janky robotic movements feeling off putting. The lights come back up, and the small figure's personal speaker crackles to life.

"You may call me Gure-Ga. Your supervisor for this game."

The grey moth-like robot waves at the group, and a boy with black hair and a surgical mask pipes up.

"Dude, what the fuck do you think you're doing?! Is this a joke? Huh? I'm not fuckin' laughing you little- you little onion fuck! I'll dismantle you myself and hang your limbs up on my wall, you goblin!" Mask boy yelps.

The moth only chuckles, clapping its tiny robot hands together.

"I like this. You're funny. We always love the funny ones for these types of games." It replies.

Boy in blue hoodie speaks next, fists clenched.

"Stop calling this a game, you sick fuck! You kidnapped like, sixteen of us for a game? A game?! Might as well bust out the game board and play us some Monopoly, funny man! Why are we really here?"

The moth stops clapping and tilts its head.

"...Alright. I guess I can't make this sound fun, can I? Okay, then."

Cooper can swear he hears the smile in its voice as it bounces, arms spread wide as if presenting something.

"You're all here for one reason, and one reason only; you will kill each other. There isn't any hope of escaping unless someone dies!"

Cooper's head goes fuzzy again. He hears Travis wretch, and more cries and outbursts from the small crowd.

He stumbles back, clutching for something, anything. Ted catches him and clutches his shoulders.

"This- This has to be a joke. This can't be real, you're bluffing!" Carson cries out, and the moth puts a hand on its face.

"It's real, funny man! Want an example? Hoohoo!"

From the wall, A TV flickers on. On the TV is the aftermath of a previous game, several people laid bloody at the foot of a podium. One person looks to be impaled through the heart.

Travis vomits on his own shoes. Cooper's mouth goes dry. Ted offers a wordless cry of shock, and the boy in the white mask, Ty, looks particularly shaken up.

"That's fake! That's fake!"
"Holy shit, I'm gonna be sick-"
"Is that..?"
"It's real… It's so real, oh my god…"

"Alright! Calm down! Calm down! Jesus, you're all making it less fun! Maybe explaining the rules will make all you children stop whining! Bleh!" The moth beeps.

On the TV, a list of rules scroll past as Gure-ga reads, its dead, reflective red eyes piercing into Cooper as he chases away that uneasy twinge in his gut.

"Rule one! Killing is so totally legal, but you cannot kill more than two people! Leave the fun to other people, too! Rule two, no assaulting the convention host! That's me! Hurting me results in death! Rule three, after a death has occurred, we will host a trial! What's a trial? Weeeell, you gather evidence, and after a short amount of time, you piece the evidence together and find the killer! Rule four! I can add more rules when I want, how I want! Hoohoo! Any questions?"

The moth is met with a stunned silence, before A boy in a yellow hat pipes up.

"...What- What happens to the killer? Do they get to go home?"

Gure-Ga cackles.

"Sure they get to go home! In a body bag! If the killer gets caught, they get eeeexecuted! Hoohoo! If they don't get caught, and you all vote someone else..? Well, let's say only the killer gets outta here alive! Mohohoho!"

Yellow hat gasps.

"N-No way! It's a lose lose situation, huh? Someone has to die no matter what? You sick bastard!"

Gure-Ga wags a finger, soulless eyes reflecting in the light.

"You coooould always just live here forever! Because there's no getting out until you kill! Hoohoo!"

Cooper clutches his head. He can feel Ted still gripped onto him, though it feels too hard. He's shaking.

"Any more questions, don't be afraid to ask me! Mohoho! After all, I'm always listening!"

The moth bounces, and a hole in the floor appears, sucking the robot down underneath the floor. Guy with the surgical mask jumps at the opportunity to get in it, but he falls on solid ground as the hole disappears. He groans and rolls onto his back.

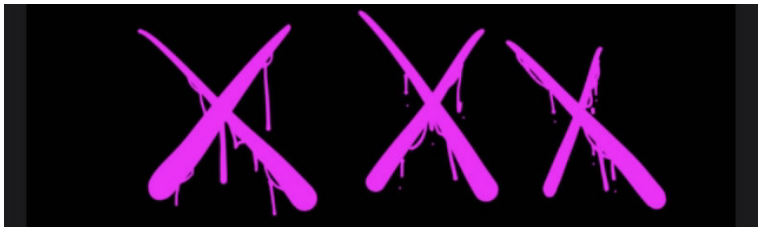
"Poke, calm down-"

"No! No, Sneeg, I won't! Why the fuck do I have any reason to calm down?! You saw what was on that TV, dude! We're all gonna fucking die here!" Mask boy, Poke, squeals, holding himself close.

Cooper's head stops hurting for a bit at this.

They really are gonna die here, aren't they.

CHAPTER 001: ADJUSTMENT TO DAILY LIFE



»»————- ☠ ————-««

Cooper stands and contemplates.

Hypothetically, he could just kill himself right now so he didn't have to deal with this. He has no attachment to these people, right? So he could just get it over with to avoid being murdered.

"Alright. I know we're all a little jumbled up, but I'm sure we'll be alright!" A girl speaks up this time.

"Miss me with that gay happy shit, pinky! I can't trust any of you!" Poke yells.

Sneeg, looking as if he had just about had enough, sighs aggressively.

“Poke, will you please shut the fuck up. The last thing we need is to immediately turn against each other. Killing may be allowed, but it’s optional. Look- why don’t we just go around and say our names and shit. If you get a sense of trust in people, maybe you won’t be a little pussy bitch.” Sneeg hisses.

Poke goes into a stunned silence, and almost looks upset. He tugs at his surgical mask.

“...Fine. I’ll go first, if it means anything. I’m Zach, but you can call me Poke. Ultimate Editor.” He scoffs.

“Brendan, or Sneeg. Ultimate PVPer.” Blue hoodie guy absentmindedly cracks a knuckle.

“Angel, Ultimate- uh, Ultimate Gamer Girl!” Pink hair girl gives a bright smile.

Cooper looks at the girl with a bit of suspicion at her talent, but his headache stops him from pressing further. How come nobody else felt this ass? Maybe he got a larger dose of kidnapping juice.

“Oh- We doing this? Okay, Charlie, Ultimate Punmaster. I guess you could say being here is pretty… killer. Ahaha. God, I don’t wanna be here.” The short blonde with glasses wrings his hands nervously.

“Puns are fucking stupid.”

“Can it, Poke.”

“Wilbur Soot! Ultimate Guitarist. Real nice to meet you all.” The guy in the beanie grins.

“Just call me Gold. Ultimate Zoologist.”

Oh, that’s yellow hat guy, Cooper thinks.

“Hm? I’m Ryan. Ultimate Construction Planner.” The guy with the blue eye patch raises his hand slightly.

“Altrive, Ultimate Pacifist. I- I also work with Ryan though. Dunno why I got a different talent.” The boy in the green and yellow jacket shrugs.

“Ted Nivison, Ultimate Commentator.” He pushes his glasses up.

“Carson, Ultimate Comedian.” He hums.

“Cooper, Ultimate Skateboarder.” Cooper sighs.

“Travis. I, uh, don’t think I got one a’ those talents. Even if I do, I don’t remember squat about it.” He shrugs.

“You may call me Schlatt. Very Successful Businessman. Connor here is my Ultimate Business Associate, you see. Ty’s our intern. Definitely getting paid, I swear.”

The Schlatt guy makes a show of it, hands on his hips and legs in a power stance. Ty strikes a pose behind him. Connor looks disappointed, almost.

“He does this a lot, it’s tiring.” He sighs.

“So- So all three of you know each other? That’s certainly odd.” Wilbur remarks.

“Make that four.”

Schlatt stiffens, and turns to the voice slowly. Cooper could almost hear a stone grinding noise as he moved. Behind Ted stepped out a tall individual with a red cape, pink surgical mask donned as well. He looked geared up, ready to fight at an instance.

“You can call me Techno. Ultimate Hitman.”

Schlatt screams, and rushes to hide behind the significantly shorter Ty.

“He followed us! He- T-T-The fucking hitman followed us, Connor! He’s gonna get us! He’s gonna fuckin’ get us, Connor! I want him gone!” He yelps. Ty only offers a mumbled “There, there.”

Techno rolls his eyes.

“I don’t even know you. I wasn’t hired to kill you, let alone ‘get’ you. You’re delusional. Besides, I don’t even use my services that much.” He scoffs.

“Being a hitman in a killing game… That’s suspicion from the start.” Gold mumbles.

Techno nods sadly.

“Yeah, I get it, I get it. I promise I won’t hurt anyone. I’m an honest man, ya know. I don’t go around murdering for the hell of it. That’s illegal.”

“Being a hitman in general is illegal!” Schlatt remarks.

“So is running a glorified exit scam.” He shoots back, deadpan. Schlatt silences himself.

Cooper zones out of the following bickering between Schlatt Co. and Techno, and instead looks at the TV still turned on. Instead of the foreboding rules, a map of the first floor of the convention hall was shown, with a small moth indicating a typical ‘YOU ARE HERE’ point. In this case, the group was located in the center of the main hall. Separate rooms, a cafeteria, a kitchen, bathrooms, and a furnace. A furnace? Odd.

“...Hey. Hey guys, we got some rooms to explore.” Cooper finally pipes up, pointing at the TV.

Gradually, they all stare down the TV.

“We get our own rooms? Isn’t that nice.”
“I’m going to the kitchen, I’ll see you guys later. Come on, you two.”
“Hey- Schlatt, wait up!”
“At least we get bathrooms.”
“A furnace..? That’s weird.”

Cooper just sighs. He needs water, and a bed. That’s all he needs. He feels dizzy.

“You okay, Cooper? You- You look a little pale.” Travis hums, staring at Cooper.

“I could say the same to you. You should clean your shoes.”

Travis looks down and grimaces.

“Oh, yeah. Okay. I’m gonna go to the bathrooms and clean ‘em. You really should lay down, Coop. You don’t look good.” He sighs.

Cooper nods slowly, and as the group thinned out and separated, he trudged to the rooms. It felt as if his legs were filled with sand, every step sent a pulsing signal of pain to his head.

Entire body filled with static, he managed to get to the rooms, all lined up neatly, eight in each row. He searches for his name, an identifying sign, anything. A plaque on the door with ‘COOPER’ scratched into it. There we go. He goes to open the door, but he finds that he can simply turn and open it. No locks, no key, nothing.

“Can’t lock doors. Alright.” He mumbles.

The bed almost beckons to him as he shuffles towards it, smacking face first into the thick green comforter. Quickly, his brain fades out into a deep sleep.

»»————- ☠ ————-««

Cooper wakes up… Better.

The fuzz is gone, the headache is still there, but the fuzz and the static and the hurt is gone, thankfully.

Strangely, however, he doesn't remember being tucked into the smuggling comforter on top of him.

He blinks the sleep out of his eyes, looking around and sitting up. He catches something in the corner of his eye, and jumps out of his skin.

"Travis-!! Jesus, you scared the shit outta me."

The curly haired boy snickers, stepping into the room. The boy had been peeking in from the corner as he did the first time, but this time he had brought a large glass of water for the blonde.

"Thought you needed it."

The glass is placed on the nightstand next to Cooper, and Travis goes to leave.

"Hey- Wait, Travis."

Travis stops in his tracks and turns around, almost worried.

"Uh- What time is it?"

"Oh! Right. You kinda slept through the whole day. Everyone's eating right now. Dunno if you want anything, but… It's there." He shrugs.

Cooper takes a sip of the water and thinks for a second.

"...I'll come down later."

Travis smiles and leaves, leaving Cooper to sip idly on the water until he musters the energy to get up.

»»————- ☠ ————-««

Cooper slips out of the door, smoothing down his hair and jamming his hands into his hoodie pockets. He certainly looked as if he slept through hell, that's for sure. The cafeteria was right around the corner, and upon stepping in, Travis waves. Ted looks up.

"Oh! Cooper." He acknowledges, then goes back to the spaghetti on his plate.

Altrive waves. "Ryan and I made pasta if you want some."

Cooper can't help but crack a smile as he sits down next to Travis, currently jamming pasta into his mouth. They could actually live in peace, if he thought about it. They could all just get along. Carson cracking jokes across the table, Sneeg and Poke going on about something he can't quite hear, Wilbur talking to Schlatt about a new song idea. The joyful crackling of hope in the air just puts a smile on Cooper's face.

»»————- ☠ ————-««

After dinner, Cooper made his way back to the rooms with Travis. The pair parted ways, and as Carson made his way to his respective room, he smiles.

"Be safe Cooper, all right? Glad to see you're feeling alright, too."

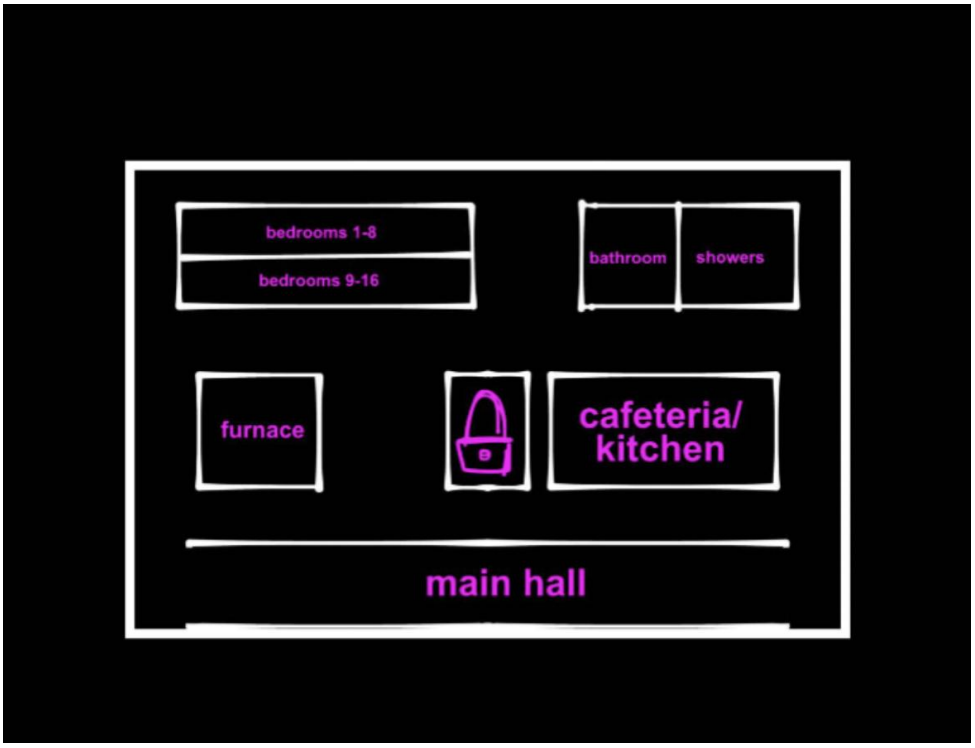
Cooper nods. "I am, too, believe me. Thanks, man."

The two enter their rooms, and Cooper shuts the door. He stands there for a minute. The doors don't lock. Someone can easily… No. No, he'll be fine. He kicks his sneakers off and wiggles his jeans off before collapsing in his bed. He yawns and worms his way under the covers, drifting off into a warm sleep.

»»————- ☠ ————-««

"A body has been discovered!"

PART 2: BODY DISCOVERY



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“A body has been discovered!”

Cooper yawns and rolls over, not having heard the announcement quite yet.

...That is, until Travis swings his door open.

“Cooper! Cooper, holy shit, Cooper- someone fucking- oh, I’m gonna be sick…” He doubles over, and Cooper shoots up in his bed.

“What?! You’re bluffing! N-No way someone killed that fast!” He wheezes, practically flying out of bed.

“Yeah- God, Cooper, he was just- just laying there. He’s practically skewered! Oh- Oh, I’m definitely going to be sick.” Travis whines as Cooper quickly tugs his jeans back on.

“Trashcan in the corner.” He gives a sympathetic look to Travis as he runs to the trashcan, bringing up last night’s pasta.

“I- I’m gonna check it out.” Cooper stammers, inching towards his door.

Travis gives a thumbs up as he kneels in front of the trashcan. Cooper opens his door and steps out. Immediately, Ted approaches him.

“Cooper- You heard, right? Someone-”

“Died, yeah.” Cooper finishes.

A sad look crosses Ted’s face as he gestures to the open bedroom door right next to his. Cooper goes ahead and steps in, and is immediately greeted to the violent sight.

Gold is pinned against the wall by the neck with two large kitchen knives jabbed through each side, blood splattering the wall and his clothes. The room is in shambles, nightstand knocked over, walls scratched.

Cooper just grimaces.

“I… Guess we have to look for evidence. If there is anything.” Cooper sighs.

“Actually- I think I got something. Last night, I heard banging and shit. Gold’s room is right next to mine, but I figured it wasn't my problem, you know? I- Damn, I coulda stopped this, couldn’t I?” Ted rubs at his arm.

“Don’t blame yourself, dude. If it means anything, I could have stopped this, too.” Cooper shrugs, then rubs his hands together.

“Alright. Time to look for evidence.”

Cooper steps inside the room, avoiding the scattered clothes from the closet and other debris strewn about. He checks the closet, the bed, the body itself, which has long grown cold, and everything he could possibly look at.

When getting to the trashcan, he peers down to find- A shard of glass? He picks it up and puts it closer to his face. Odd. From what he could gather, the rooms were spotless when they arrived, and Gold didn’t have any sort of glassware on him. This could have been from the killer.

Cooper pockets the glass and heads out. Seeing as Charlie and Carson were already investigating the cafeteria for evidence, Cooper heads to the furnace. A long shot, but still able to help. He opens the heavy wood door to the furnace room, the room itself hot enough to already have beads of sweat forming on his head. He steps carefully towards the furnace, looking around. Nothing here. He opens the furnace, tugging hard before the creaking door opened. He peeks his head in, looking inside the (thankfully) deactivated furnace.

There, at the very bottom, is a melted piece of fabric. It's melted and twisted, so possibly polyester. Laying in a charred heap is the remnants of a jacket. Cooper takes a mental note and leaves the furnace room.

As Cooper goes to look for more evidence, he passes by Charlie and Carson exiting the cafeteria.

"Cooper, we, uh, found something in the kitchen-" Carson starts.

"Yeah! I think the killer knocked over the knife holder, because when we went to check it out, the kitchen knives were scattered all over the floor. Plus, two knives were missing from the holder. My bet is that the killer's probably super clumsy or something." Charlie puts his hands on his hips as if he was proud of his deduction.

"I found something in the furnace. Some melted chunk of fabric. Weird, right?" Cooper hums.

Charlie goes to open his mouth, but the robotically chipper tone of Gure-ga sings through the speakers.

"Investigation time has now ended! Please go to the main hall for our first trial!"

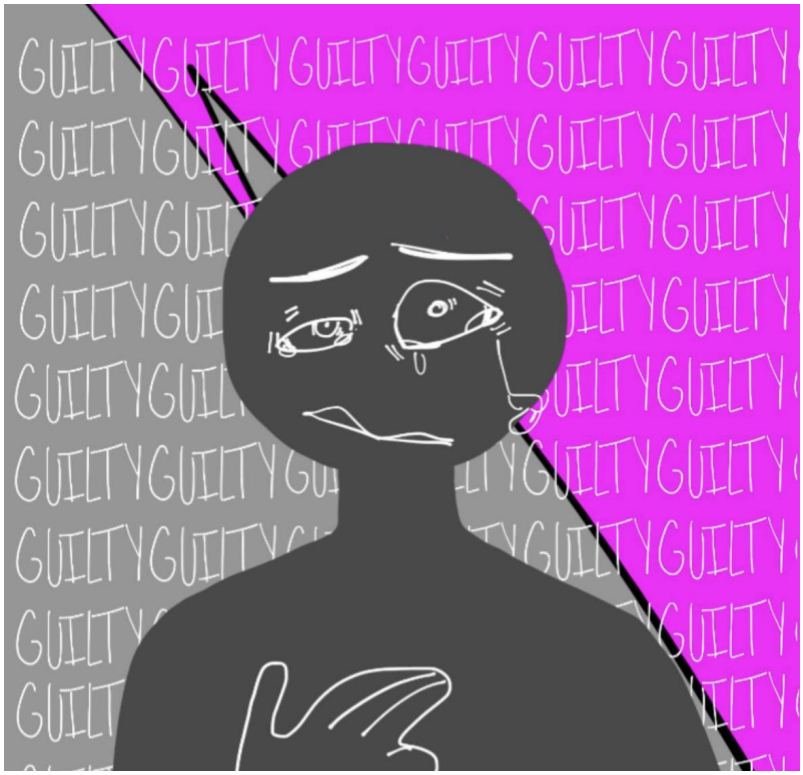
Cooper swallows the lump in his throat and walks to the main hall, eyes carefully scanning his peers. Travis catches up with him, tapping the back of his shoulder. Cooper turns to look at him, and he gives a reassuring smile. Still, the gnawing feeling of potential betrayal gnaws at his bones. It could be Travis that did it, for all he knows.

The pair enter the main hall to find that the center of the main hall has sixteen podiums circling each other, identical to the ones shown in the video at the beginning. Cooper starts to feel sick, but pushes the feeling down as he stands at a podium. The others filter in, standing at their own respective podium.

The podium where Gold would have stood is vacant, replaced with a portrait frame of him, his eyes crossed out. Cooper tries not to look at it.

"Hohoho! The trial of Gold's murder will begin now! You all have a period of time to solve the murder and bring the murderer to justice! Display evidence, and beee careful! Let the trial begin!"

PART 3: TRIAL AND EXECUTION



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ANGEL: So, let's start with what we know, guys! I feel like that would be easier to start wi-

POKE: Whoever killed Gold gets my foot up your ass!

ANGEL: …

ANGEL: Um. Okay, so, Gold was most likely killed during the middle of the night.

COOPER: He was really cold when I touched him. And stiff. Eugh.

ANGEL: That's rigor mortis for you, dummy.

ANGEL: Gold bled out because of the knives in his throat, I'm sure you already know that.

ANGEL: So! How about we try piecing this together now! One at a time, with the evidence.

COOPER: Ted said that he could hear banging last night.

TED: Yeah, I could.

SNEEG: What time?

TED: Um… Around two?

ANGEL: So, we can place his death around that time, right?

WILBUR: Well, to be fair, Gold's room was a total mess. What Ted heard could have been the room being trashed.

[NON STOP DEBATE: BEGIN.]

COOPER: Why would the killer wreck his room..?

ANGEL: Maybe to draw suspicion away from the crime? Make it seem like Gold fought back. The killer could blame it on **self defense**.

POKE: The killer's a fucking idiot, then.

SCHLATT: So, what? The killer made this big scene to make them look innocent? Hate to break it to you, but murder is murder. Techno would know.

TECHNO: Do you have a grudge against me or something..?

CARSON: Maybe Gold did fight back. The killer **might not be that hard to overpower**.

ANGEL: I didn't see any bruises on him… He might have won an initial fight, which could explain the messy room, but ultimately lost.

CARSON: That could explain the **blood under his fingernails**.

[BREAK!]

COOPER: What do you mean, blood under his fingernails?

CARSON: Uh- What? You didn't see it? You woke up late, so you probably didn't do as much investigating as me. Yeah, there was blood under his fingernails.

SNEEG: So that would have to mean that Gold had fought the killer. Scratched at him.

COOPER: You think that Gold got a punch in?

SNEEG: What makes you say that?

COOPER: I found glass in the trashcan. That could be from someone's glasses.

TED: Eh? Don't tell me you're blaming me for this. I got an alibi.

CHARLIE: Hey, me too! I was real tired last night. After dinner I collapsed in my bed and refused to move for the rest of the night.

CARSON: I can vouch for him. I watched him fling himself into bed.

SCHLATT: And what did you do afterwards, hm?

CARSON: I, uh, went to bed. As you do.

SCHLATT: All right, all right…

SCHLATT: And where's that tri-color jacket of yours, Carson?

CARSON: …

COOPER: …

CHARLIE: ...Hold on. Are you accusing him?

TRAVIS: Wait, what's going on? I'm confused.

CONNOR: Carson murdered Gold.

CARSON: I did not!

CONNOR: Oh, really?

CARSON: Yeah!

[NON STOP DEBATE: BEGIN.]

CARSON: There's no way I murdered Gold, I was knocked out like a light!

SCHLATT: Then where's your jacket? **Covered in blood?**

CONNOR: I bet he stashed it somewhere to hide evidence.

CHARLIE: There's no way that Carson did it! He went into his room after me!

SCHLATT: You know, that could explain the knocked over knives in the kitchen… That clumsy ape knocked everything over!

CARSON: Stop antagonizing me!

CARSON: Besides, there's **literally nothing else against me!** You're just being a dick!

[BREAK!]

ANGEL: You say there's nothing else against you, but it looks like the odds are already up against you to begin with.

CARSON: H-Huh?

ANGEL: That shard of glass in the trashbin… Carson, do you have a backup pair of glasses?

CARSON: Yeah, but that isn't the-!!

CARSON: …

CARSON: Oh, I see. Trying to incriminate me just because I carry a backup pair of glasses! Real funny!

ANGEL: That IS funny, because there's one other thing that can really incriminate you.

ANGEL: Cooper, you know what it is, right?

…

What is the biggest piece of evidence against Carson?

A. HIS ALIBI
B. THE KNIVES IN THE KITCHEN
C. [**THE FABRIC IN THE FURNACE**]

…

COOPER: ...I found some melted fabric in the furnace.

SNEEG: Melted..? Like polyester?

POKE: Carson was wearing a jacket the first day he got here… Is Schlatt right? Did he shove it somewhere in his room?

COOPER: No. He got too much blood on the jacket, and had to dispose of it entirely.

CARSON: Cooper, come on! This- This isn't funny, knock it off-

ANGEL: …Charlie, did Carson really go straight to his room last night?

CHARLIE: …

CHARLIE: ...No, but-

ANGEL: I rest my case.

GURE-GA: Have you all finally come to an agreement? In that case, it's voting time!

CARSON: No- You guys- You guys are wrong! Stop it! Stop it!

»»————- ☠ ————-««

A slot machine comes up from the center of the floor. As everyone submitted their votes into the electronic tablet installed into the face of the podium, the slot machine buzzed louder and louder. As Cooper finally submit his last vote, the slot machine spun and quickly landed on someone's face. Carson looked on in absolute horror as his face appeared in all three slots. He had done it. And he was going to die.

"...I- I can't believe it." He chokes out, a hand covering his mouth.

"Carson? Why did- Why did you do it?" Ryan stammers, white knuckling the podium. His remaining eye looks angry, on the verge of tears.

"I- I thought it would fix things. I just wanted to- to go home. I just wanted to go home! Why can't I fucking go home?!" He sobs.

"Carson…" Charlie starts.

"Save it. God damnit, I thought by- by killing someone, I could just try and end the game. Maybe this was a bluff. So, I- I snuck into Gold's room. I grabbed a couple knives from the kitchen earlier. He- He put up a fight. Got me good. I got him to the ground, though. Rest is history." He stops for a shaky inhale. His face grows more red the more he continues, the closer he gets to breaking.

"Got a lot of blood on my jacket. Had to burn it. Then, I just- just went back to sleep. I don't know, I don't know…" He sniffles.

Cooper can't help but feel his throat close a little.

“Gee, what a heart wrenching story! Lucky for you all, I got a perfect execution for the Ultimate Comedian!”

Carson looks up in shock, wiping away tears and snot.

“You- You what? No- No, wait, can’t I just-”

“Too late! Thanks for kicking off the killing game though, Cargskin! Hohoho! Are ya ready?”

Carson’s breathing starts to pick up. He backs away from his podium slowly, arms closed in on himself.

“You- You can’t- Please- Please, I don’t wanna die! I don’t! I don’t deserve this, I don’t want to die! Don’t do this to me!” He hollers.

Cooper can see a few people cringe in pity out of the corner of his eye.

Gure-ga flaps its wings, and it disappears into the floor. Carson stands there, vulnerable and sobbing, scanning the faces of the rest of his peers. From the floor, a chain clamps itself around Carson’s ankles, He’s tripped, and scrapes at the ground as he’s dragged off. The TV turns on again, showcasing the scene.

»»————- ☠ ————-««

Carson was being dragged through a hallway, dragged far until the light at the end of the tunnel opens to a stage. Carson is then dragged to the stage and stood up in front of a microphone. Several Gure-Ga robots sit there in silence. Carson peeks to his left. A neon sign blinks “COMEDY NIGHT” into the cold, desolate silence. Carson shakily pushes his glasses up and starts telling jokes.

Every joke he tells, the robots simply get more and more angry at him.

“Uh… Wood fired pizza? How will pizza get a job now?” He chuckles uneasily.

The robots begin to boo him. They chuck tomatoes at him, the rotten fruits thankfully not hitting him. However, as they hit the floor, they release a tiny explosion. Bombs, Carson realizes. More and more bombs are pelted at him, and Carson begins to have to jump out of the way of some bombs.

From seemingly out of nowhere comes a giant tomato, lobbed from the ceiling. It approaches Carson at a fast rate, and the boy squeezes his eyes shut. The bomb hits and the entire scene is blown to pieces. The camera recording is destroyed, and the remaining participants are left with a blank static screen.

»»————- ☠ ————-««

“...He- He’s really dead.” Travis whimpers.

“I just had a hand in sending someone to death...” Cooper whispers, a low whisper of guilt.

Gure-Ga claps.

“Hohoho! Wasn’t that fun! And as a reward for your greeeat detective skills, you get new rooms on the second floor! Have fun, kiddos!”

The moth disappears and the others are left in silence. Cooper can swear he can hear someone crying, but he doesn’t bother to check. He can’t bother to check. He, instead, puts his hands over his face and screams.

CHAPTER 002: DIZZYING SECRETS

»»————- ☠ ————-««

It’s been a few days. Cooper wakes up once more in the same spot he’s been in since Carson died, buried under his sheets and refusing to move. Of course, he’s gotten up to use the bathroom and eat, but other than that, he’s only ever seen Travis around.

He stays underneath the smothering comforter for a while, contemplating once more exactly why he had a hand in this. He had inadvertently murdered someone, someone who was forced to murder with the prospect of returning home. Carson just wanted to go home.

He just wanted to go home.

Cooper catches himself before he feels tears welling up in the corners of his eyes, so he buries his face in his comforter and groans. He needs to get up. He needs to leave.

The blonde eventually worms himself out of bed, knees popping as he stands up straight. He doesn’t bother with his old jeans today, and instead sorts through the closet of the bedroom he was given. He opens the thin wood door to find a few outfits all matching the one he arrived with, various striped shirts, green hoodies and jeans. Folded in the bottom of the closet is a pair of pajamas and a pair of sweatpants. Great. He’s been sleeping in jeans for how many days?

Cooper pulls on the sweatpants and trudges out into the hall, catching eye contact with Ryan. He gives a sympathetic look.

“Y’know, I haven’t seen you for almost like, four days. You- You’re really taking this hard, aren’t you? I- I’m sorry you feel like that, Cooper.” Ryan sighs.

Cooper just grimaces.

“I feel like shit and I have no clue why. You think it’s ‘cause I kinda was friends with Carson? I didn’t expect that ape to murder, but his ass got blown up, so who’s the ape here.” He deadpans. Ryan flinches.

“Damn. Hey- how about after you shower, I show you something cool on the second floor. You’ll like it, I promise!” He smiles. Despite lacking an eye, the one not covered by the patch is almost sparkling with excitement.

“I wasn’t planning on showering-“

“You should probably shower.” Ryan smiles.

Cooper gives him a look as the construction planner steps into what he can assume is Altrive's room. Off he goes to the shower, he guesses. From what he can remember, showering always made him feel better after bad shit happens.

He heads to the showers with his hands in his pockets, occasionally passing one of his trapped peers. He opens the shower door, only to hear Travis call for him from behind. He turns around to find the boy waving something around.

"Cooper! Cooper, guess what! Wilbur's doing a concert!" He grins. Cooper lets go of the door.

"Huh? " He mumbles, and Travis pushes a paper into Cooper's hands.

The paper itself is blue and decorated in fish stickers, with 'WILBUR SOOT PRESENTS: SUPER COOL MUSIC CONCERT' printed in the center in bold. On the bottom is 'Location: Concert Hall, Tomorrow at 6pm.' printed in loopy cursive. Cooper snorts. Wilbur really took advantage of that computer lab.

"So? We should go! Wilbur said he's like, real good at guitar, ya know?" Travis bounces in place.

"What do you mean we..?"

"Oh- Uh, well, I kinda assumed- um- 'cause like, we're friends- we are friends, right?" Travis stammers, wringing his hands.

Cooper just smiles.

"Of course we're friends you damn goblin." Cooper chuckles.

"Oh. Oh! Great! Um, alright. So you'll go? You know where the concert hall is, right? On the second floor?" Travis asks.

Cooper nods and pockets the flyer.

"You gonna go get breakfast? I, uh, can assume after you shower?"

"Yeah. I'll see you down there." Cooper nods, stepping in. Travis bumbles off.

»»————- ☠ ————-««

Cooper steps out of the showers, the steam rolling out into the colder hallway as he walks to his room with a towel around his waist. Unfortunately for him, the skateboarder doesn't notice the odd presence of three people watching him from around the corner. He does, however, turn to look in the direction. They all seem to duck around the corner, save for the blonde in the blue tie. Connor.

God damnit, he thinks, they've been watching him.

"Can I help you?" He asks monotonously, tightening the towel around his waist.

Connor's pulled back around the corner, and after some heavy whispering, Schlatt steps out. He smugly brushes his fingers through his brown bangs, smirking at the blonde with somewhat malicious intent. Cooper just scoffs.

"Coopeeer. So nice of us to conventionally bump into each other." The brunette puts his hands on his hips. Connor and Ty watch from afar. Cooper rolls his eyes.

"Yeah. Very nice. Listen, I'm in the middle of not being in the middle of this conversation, so if I can just get back to that-"

"Ah ah," Schlatt wags a finger at him, "not just yet, Coopie."

"Call me that again and I wring your neck." Cooper grits his teeth. Schlatt continues smirking.

"You know, you never followed up on that business offer of mine. Me and you can do great things, Cooper. A man is always in need of a sponsorship, and as someone who worked his way to the top, I'm your man, or my name isn't Jay Schlatt." He chuckles. Cooper flips him off.

"Yeah, alright. Call me when you get your head out of your ass." Cooper groans.

Schlatt just smiles. Cooper can see the other two peek out from around the corner again. Connor whispers something to Ty. The intern chuckles quietly.

"I know things, Cooper. I know a lot of things. I know some things you don't know. Just say you'll consider working with me, Cooper. After all, I think it'd be in your best interest to partner with someone that has a very… special person on his team."

Ty giggles. Cooper can faintly see a shiny, sharp little object in his pink hoodie sleeve. His gaze goes back to Schlatt, smirk growing wider.

"I don't want to have my partners try and convince you. You can partner with me at any time, Cooper. Just say the word." Schlatt extends a hand but Cooper swats it away, a hand still on his towel.

"Listen, Gay Slut," Schlatt's mouth hangs open, ready to make an obscene comment, "I really do not want to go through this. Go bother Wilbur or something. You seem to like the bother him, at least."

“Rude! I’m not gay, I am not! I love gay people, Schlatt Co. fully endorses gay people! Right Connor?”

Connor nods.

“Yeah! See? Schlatt Co. loves the gays, but I’m not gay! Get outta here, Cooper.” He flushes angrily and stomps off, adjusting his tie. Connor and Ty follow.

Cooper just sighs heavily and walks back to his room to actually get out of the towel.

»»————- ☠ ————-««

Cooper steps out of his room ten minutes later in a pair of jeans and striped shirt. Thumbs looped in his front belt loops, he shuffles about. He could meet Travis for food, or…

“Hey, Cooper! You still up to see what’s on the second floor?” Oh right.

He looks to his right and Ryan is leaning against the wall idly peeling at a bandaid on his cheek. He smiles.

“Huh? Oh. I guess so.”

Ryan jumps up and claps, then starts walking to a staircase on the right. Cooper follows the construction planner up as he jogs up. He makes a left into a hallway that opens to several doors, all propped open. Cooper can catch what looks to be a miniature zoo in one room, a room lined with monitors and computers, a stage in another, one that looks like a model of a corporate office, among others.

“I didn’t think you knew, but whoever’s running this thing gave us these rooms that kinda mirror our talents! Isn’t that cool?” He bounces on his heels.

“Uh, yeah. Hey, does Travis have a room?” He asks nonchalantly.

“Um… I think? Everyone here has a room, so he might.” He nods, and marches down the hallway.

“Oh- Oh, here! This one’s got Travis written on the door!” Ryan waves Cooper over.

He heads to the room and peeks in to find a blank white room. Nothing. No sort of telling sign of an ultimate. Perhaps Travis really was talentless. Or maybe the people running this is hiding something on Travis. No. He doesn’t want to think about this.

“Wanna see yours?” Ryan asks. Cooper just nods.

Next to Travis' is his own talent room, and as he peeks in he utters a small gasp. Inside are structures that make up some sort of skate park, with a concrete floor and a few ramps and bowls. A rack of skateboards are hung up on the wall to pair with the miniature skate park.

"Whoa! Isn't that cool?" Ryan looks in behind him. Cooper gives a small smile.

"Yeah. Yeah, that's pretty cool." He nods.

"Hey- Ryan, Cooper, you checking the talent rooms? Mine's so boring, it's unreal. The hell do you do with Ultimate Pacifist? It's bullshit." From behind Cooper comes Altrive, hands shoved into his jacket.

Ryan turns around to greet him, waving.

"Huh? I mean, can't you just talk to whoever gave you it? You did say you work with Ryan, why not just get the same title?"

Altrive goes to say something, but stops. He looks confused. So does Ryan.

"Huh… Well, uh, funny thing is, I don't exactly remember who or what gave me an ultimate. I really only woke up here knowing my name, my ultimate, and the fact that I know Ryan." He rubs the back of his neck.

Cooper thinks for a second. Come to think of it, he doesn't remember a lot either. Just his name and talent.

"I think we're all in the same situation in terms of memory loss. That's real weird." Ryan remarks.

Cooper's head starts to hurt again. The fact that he's missing so much for no reason is almost unreal to him. What the hell did they do to him?

"...Cooper? Cooper, you're spacing out." Ryan waves a hand in front of his face. Cooper flinches.

"Oh. Sorry, I was saying that- um, you know what? Nevermind. Let's just go back downstairs, okay?" Ryan smiles. Altrive looks nervous, almost.

"Oh. Yeah, alright." Cooper blinks a few times and nods.

Ryan and Altrive walk ahead of Cooper as he shuffles behind, deep in thought. There's definitely something going on. The lack of memories, the odd connections, something is definitely lurking underneath the surface. Cooper, in fact, was so deep in thought, he failed to notice Wilbur bumping into him.

“Oh- Cooper! You are Cooper, right? Are you coming to my concert? I just felt that, well, since there’s a concert hall, and the fact that my talent room contains several musical instruments, I thought, hey? Why not give a little morale boost, huh? People like music, save for Poke, Sneeg and Altrive, apparently- hey- Cooper, you listening?” The British man snaps his fingers at Cooper.

“Huh- Yeah, yeah, I’ll be there. I get ya. Yeah.”

He feels sick again.

»»————- ☠ ————-««

It’s funny, how things change so quickly.

Because here he is, driving down a highway with his friends. With Twitchcon being right at their heels, they were all reasonably abuzz. [illegible] being at wheel going off about something, himself in the front seat with his head resting wordlessly on the windowsill of the car, [illegible], [illegible] and [illegible] all generally enjoying themselves in the backseat. [illegible] cracks a joke. He breaks into a smile as he yawns.

The soft humming of the road beneath them and the reflective white lines on the asphalt hypnotise him into a half-sleep, despite the noises coming from the three in the back.

[illegible] says something. He doesn’t hear him. The humming gets louder in his ears.

He can hear the noise quiet down in the back. The car pulls to the side and slows. [illegible] gets out.

He can hear him screaming, a deep “holy shit, that’s a body!” coming from outside.

[illegible] nudges him out of his half-sleep. He blinks himself to consciousness.

“Hey, dude come on. There’s- Dude, there’s a body in front of the car. Is your phone working?”

He shakes his head. His phone’s been dead for the past hour, he remembers complaining about it when they were doing a failed attempt at car karaoke.

He opens the car door and joins the others outside. It takes a minute to register, but that’s a body alright. [illegible] steps back.

“Dude- That’s Joko. Is that Joko? What the fuck?!”

[illegible] flips the bruised corpse over with his foot. He lifts the floppy brown hair covering its face.

“...Joko. Y-Yeah.”

[illegible] retches.

"How the hell did he get out here?" [illegible] wheezes.

He blinks once, twice. He stares out at the shrubbery. Something moves.

Before he can respond, before he can do so much as get back to the car, someone grabs at [illegible]. He's pulled back and a tranquilizer dart stabs into his shoulder. The boy staggers, looks at [illegible] at him with a pleading look, and falls back.

[illegible] tries to throw a punch at the figure. A dart lands in his arm.

More figures appear and surround [illegible] and himself. [illegible] scrambles backwards and gets cornered by the figures.

[illegible] gets stabbed with a seperate needle directly into his neck. He vomits immediately.

He doesn't feel the dart hit his thigh as he drifts off into black.

PART 2: BURIED DEEP

»»————- ☠ ————-««

Cooper wakes up in a cold sweat, panting. He runs a hand down his face once, twice, and it's only on the third time he feels tears on his face.

Why the hell was he crying? Who the fuck is Joko? Was that him? It had to be. Who was he with? He can't tell, he doesn't know, he doesn't fucking know…

"Cooper! Coop, hey, Wilbur's concert is today! Wanna come?" Travis knocks from the other side of the door. Cooper groans and sits up.

When the hell did he get to bed? He can't even keep track of time anymore. This game messes with his head. He's fucking losing it.

"Huh? Open the door, Trav." He groans. Travis utters an "oh right" and pushes the door open.

Travis pushes his baseball cap further back and smiles, the blue flyer sticking out of the pocket of his basketball shorts.

“You’re still coming, right Coop?” He smiles.

Cooper gives a tired smile and nods. Travis excitedly rocks on his heels, practically bouncing.

“Really? I- I woulda thought you didn’t wanna come, what with you being grumpy and sick all the time, but I’m glad to see you wanna come!” He chuckles.

“Yeah, Wilbur kinda talked to me about it.” He nods.

“Oh- well in that case, uh, cool.”

A beat of silence.

“You mind if I stay here? My room’s kinda cold. Your room is warmer an’ it kinda smells better.” He hops onto Cooper’s bed regardless of his oncoming protest.

“Probably because you’re a sweaty little gremlin.” Cooper deadpans. Travis bursts out laughing.

“Nooo! Don’t be mean!” Travis flops himself onto Cooper’s bed. Playfully, he tries shoving him off. Travis doesn’t budge.

“Yeah, you’re a little idiot goblin. Sweaty ass, sitting caked in your own sweat. Headass.” Another shove. Travis keeps giggling.

Cooper can’t help but smirk a little at the display, the curly haired boy splayed out on his bed. He smiles up at Cooper, and the blonde wrinkles his nose.

“Pheh. Gay.” Cooper bonks Travis in the nose. He makes a noise of surprise and flops a little.

“Hey! Rude.” He sticks his tongue out. Cooper chuckles.

“Alright, whatever. You want breakfast, monkey?” He scoffs. Travis nods.

“Yeah. I want bacon. They got bacon?” He rolls off the bed with an “oof”.

Cooper shrugs as he puts a hoodie on.

At least for now, he can get his mind off that dream.

»»————- ☠ ————-««

Travis is sat down on the floor of Cooper’s room munching on what Cooper can only assume to be spam. Travis had claimed that he could cook, and yet, the boy had burned the bacon to an inedible crisp and instead opted to take spam from the fridge in the kitchen.

“...That’s disgusting.” Cooper remarks.

Travis takes another spoonful of spam and shoves it into his mouth out of spite.

“You can’ tell me wha’ to do.” He huffs.

“Close your damn mouth.” Cooper scoffs.

Travis eats another spoonful of spam.

“...You are so gross.” He sighs, biting into the eggs he managed to salvage from Travis cooking. The burnt taste lingers in his mouth for far too long.

“It isn’t my fault I somehow caused a little fire. It got put out anyways! It’s fine!” Travis yelps. Cooper flings a charred bit of egg at the boy.

“Says you. I was scared I was gonna catch my hair on fire!”

“Okay, I don’t think a grease fire is that bad-!”

“Techno’s sleeve caught on fire!”

“Yeah, well, he’s got more, so…”

“Travis. I am never letting you in that kitchen again. It took a literal hour to stop the fire. Please, just- never go near the stove. You’re impossible.” Cooper pinches the bridge of his nose.

Travis just gives a small smile. Cooper doesn’t quite know how he can stand him, and yet, he feels as if he needs to see him to feel better about something. He doesn’t know what, or why, but his presence is almost… Assuring.

»»————- ☠ ————-««

Cooper sits in one of the couches in the main hall, zoned out beyond human comprehension. Every now and again he would look at the ominous red clock hung up on the wall next to the TV, ticking every second. He would count every second, hear every tick bounce around in his head. He would tune out everything but the clock, letting the ticking swim in his brain amongst the aching feeling of something missing.

Sometimes the ticking helped him forget what was missing.

He can barely hear Travis stomp up next to him excitedly, and it takes a jostle from the boy to snap him out.

“Cooper, c’mon, Wilbur’s gonna start soon! Concert hall’s up the staircase, let’s go!” He bounces as Cooper snaps back to himself.

The skateboarder stands up and looks at Travis, who was practically itching to move. Cooper gives him a nod, and the two are off. Around the corner and up the staircase, the duo reached the large red doors of the concert hall.

Travis pushes the doors open, and on the stage is Wilbur sitting on a stool and tuning an acoustic guitar. Altrive and Ted are chatting excitedly, Schlatt is cowering behind Connor and Ty, staring daggers into Techno as he broods alone by the stage. Angel is sitting on the stage, swinging her feet as she watches Wilbur tune the guitar. Ryan is leaning by the door. Cooper gives him a wave as Travis practically drags him inside.

Wilbur looks up from his guitar and stands up, moving the mic in front of him towards him.

“Hi! Hello, hello. Looks as if almost everyone came! Poke and Sneeg passed on the opportunity, and Charlie said he wanted to check his talent room out. So, looks as if I got you guys! Isn’t that exciting!”

A light applause. Schlatt cackles.

“Awesome, alright, well..! I’ll be performing a few songs I’ve written myself, as well as a few covers I’ve found to be quite nice. So!” Wilbur hoists the guitar up and pulls the stool up closer to lean on.

Wilbur begins playing a song about squids as Cooper stares at the man on stage. Travis bobs along to the music, and Cooper just smiles. The whole idea of this was just… a good idea to Cooper. Sure, not everyone would come, and sure, if it wasn’t for Travis he wouldn’t be here, but this concert was mostly just to get his mind off of the game. The game was messing with his head, admittedly, and this was able to ground him. He felt… actually safe.

Wilbur finishes his song, and the small group in the concert hall applaud.

“Oh, ah, thank you! This next one-“

The lights in the concert hall flicker, then turn off entirely. The remaining participants gasp and complain in various manners, but Cooper falls silent. The noises lull, and a thump is heard before Gure-ga chimes in through the announcements.

“A body has been discovered!”

PART 3: BODY DISCOVERY

»»————- ☠ -————««

“A body has been discovered!”

The people in the concert hall shuffle around and shout in confusion. Cooper can hear Wilbur’s guitar drop to the floor. Someone screams.

“S-Someone turn the lights on!” Someone calls out. Travis.

“I can’t find the switch!” Angel yells from farther away.

The lights turn back on suddenly, the light filling Cooper’s eyes. He blinks away the temporary blindness, and looks around. Everyone was there, everyone was safe.

But not Poke, Sneeg, or Charlie.

“Is everyone alright?”
“I’m fine, I just tripped!”
“Who screamed?”

“That was Schlatt.”

“Oh shit- If everyone here is fine, then-! Guys, the other three!” Wilbur seemingly voices his thoughts for him. The others go silent.

“...We gotta split up and look for them.” Angel declares, and Cooper nods.

As Cooper, followed by Travis, walks to the door, Poke kicks it in. He’s sweaty, panting, the blood drained from his face.

“G-Guys- the freezer- the freezer, he- he just- oh, fuck..!” He wheezes, tugging on his surgical mask.

Angel steps in from behind and grips at the smaller man’s shoulders.

“Who? Who, Poke? Who- Who was in the freezer?” She asks calmly.

“He- oh fuck, oh fuck! I- I can’t, just- freezer. I need- I need to sit down.” He stumbles out of Angel’s hands, shuffling away and eventually collapsing to his knees. He sits there, muttering.

Travis looks at Cooper worryingly, and leaves, presumably to go to the freezer in the kitchen.

“Travis?” Cooper follows quickly after him, marching down the stairs.

To the kitchen the pair went, stepping in from the cafeteria and into the large kitchen. Travis stares at the scene blankly. Sneeg had fainted in front of the door, still propped open by his leg being jammed into it. Travis simply steps forward and pushes the metal door open all the way, the impossibly cold air blasting him and swirling into the kitchen. His teeth already start to chatter. Cooper looks in from behind, and the distant smell of rust hits the back of his throat. Someone really had killed again.

Charlie was propped up in the corner of the freezer, blue in the face and stiff. His hair had been frozen over with blood still in his hair, and his eyes had been frozen shut by, presumably, tears. He was laying there, laying cold like a rag doll in a blood stained light green hoodie. Clutched in a frozen hand, blackened with frostbite, is a flyer for Wilbur’s show.

Travis takes a step back in shock, gasping. His breath comes out in quick fogs as he curls into himself for warmth.

“Holy- Holy shit, Charlie…” He whimpers.

“He froze to death.” Cooper states bluntly.

Travis looks at him, puzzled, then looks back at Charlie.

“How can you tell-?” He asks. He steps closer to Charlie’s body, and bends down, wiggling the hand with the flyer in it.

“I- I think the blood in his hair was from a wound, but he didn’t die from that. No way. I think the killer stuck him in here before Wilbur’s show to kill him without touching him.” Cooper analyses, wrinkling his nose at Travis. The curly haired boy continues to wiggle Charlie’s hand.

“That, uh, makes sense. He was probably on his way to the concert and stuff, then he got bonked from behind and put in here to die. Oh, poor Charlie… This- This is just cruel.”

“Yeah, poor Charlie.”

From behind the pair comes Techno, red cape wrapped around his body as a makeshift blanket.

“You know, he probably wasn’t just on his way to the concert. Do you know how long it takes to freeze to death? In these conditions, in what he was wearing, coupled with his injury… Well, I’m sure you can pick up what I’m putting down.” He sighs.

“...He could have been in here for hours before dying.” Travis speaks up.

Techno nods and pulls the cape closer to himself.

“I found something when looking for the body. A stain, more particularly a stain in Poke’s lab. That, and a couple broken wooden pieces of something. I think Charlie was originally attacked in there, then dragged into this freezer to die. The killer didn’t want blood on their hands.” Techno hums.

“You think it’s jus’ a setup to frame Poke?” Travis chimes in.

“I don’t know. What I do know is that we should get out of this freezer before we end up like Charlie.” Techno turns on his heel and starts to walk out.

Cooper and Travis follow, shivering. Cooper spares a sorry glance to Charlie’s body, then to Sneeg, still face down on the floor. He bends down and shakes the man’s head around, and thankfully, he begins to stir. He picks himself up off the floor and stares back at Charlie. He shivers, and not because of the cold it seems.

“Who- Who the fuck would have done this?” Sneeg mumbles as Travis and Cooper leave. Techno idles around the kitchen more.

The pair walk back into the main hall from the cafeteria in silence, observing the others around them looking for evidence. Cooper looks down at the floor, and stares at what looks to be faded scuff marks. That, and every so often, a drop of blood.

Cooper takes a mental note as the podiums rise from the floor once again. Where Charlie once stood is a portrait of him, like Carson and Gold, crossed out with a bright red X. He feels a little nauseated looking at them. Three people dead, and if they get it right, soon to be four people.

And yet he still can't get that dream out of his head.

"Aaaalright, maggots! Please assemble yourselves in the main hall once more for our second class trial!" Gure-ga chimes over the intercom.

Cooper perks up as Travis walks over, looking down at the end of the hall to see Wilbur and Schlatt walking down towards the podium, in typical fashion, with Schlatt walking slower. The others filter in and Cooper heads to his designated podium, along with Travis, who stands at his side.

"Alrighty! The trial of who killed Charlie, the self proclaimed Ultimate Punmaster, will commence! You know the drill, present your evidence, your arguments, and in a period of time, you will vote for who you think the killer is! Ohohoho, have fun!" Gure-ga cackles, this time swinging its legs on a couch pulled closer to the podiums, behind Angel and Connor and overlooking the rest. It has popcorn, and periodically throws it into a mouth that isn't there.

"...Let's get going, I guess." Cooper hums.

PART 4: TRIAL AND EXECUTION

»»————- ☠ ————-««

COOPER: So, what do we know so far? We all split up to look for the body, so what evidence was there?

CONNOR: I went with Ty, Schlatt and Wilbur. We found that one of Wilbur's guitars in his lab was missing.

ANGEL: So that could be our weapon? A guitar?

ALTRIVE: I've been hit in the head plenty of times, but a guitar? As a murder weapon? That's new.

TECHNO: There was a stain in Poke's lab. On the floor, by one of the computers. That and a few wooden pieces.

CONNOR: From the guitar, I can assume.

RYAN: Speaking of body, where… where was Charlie?

COOPER: He was in the freezer. He had a wound on the back of his head, and, um, he- he froze to death in there.

WILBUR: That- That's brutal!

COOPER: Yeah, he had a flyer for your concert in his hand, too. If he was attacked in Poke's talent room, he could have been using the computer, or taking a flyer from there I guess.

WILBUR: That- That doesn't make sense. I printed everything out in the computer lab, not Poke's room.

SCHLATT: Yeah. You got a point, Will. So why was Charlie REALLY in Poke's room?

POKE: The computer lab has no online access, so maybe he was in my lab to check the internet access.

TY: That's stupid. Techno, did you check the computers?

TECHNO: I… didn't.

ANGEL: But I did. I checked the computer where the blood stain was. All that was open was a few journal entries and a bunch of encrypted files. Charlie was up to something.

SNEEG: Up to something..? Like a double agent or something?

ANGEL: You could say that.

COOPER: What..?

ANGEL: From what I could gather from the entries, Charlie had been in contact with someone labelled only as "MASTERMIND". The entries had been saying that he had been feeding information to this mastermind about… us. Little details he had gathered, and it was all on those files. My guess is that the mastermind was going to exploit those to get us to kill.

SNEEG: So what… what you're saying is that Charlie was selling out?

ANGEL: Selling out for protection from the mastermind. It doesn't look like it worked, though.

WILBUR: But… But how do you know that Charlie isn't the mastermind himself? Huh? He could have been the big bad.

SCHLATT: If he were the mastermind behind this game, the game would have stopped. He was a traitor to us.

WILBUR: Oh…

COOPER: ...Anyways, uh, there were scuff marks and blood drops in the main hall, you think that the killer dragged Charlie down to the freezer?

ANGEL: Quite possibly. Charlie gets attacked in Poke's talent room, gets dragged out into the freezer to be disposed of. The killer then cleans up most of the evidence.

SNEEG: It feels like… Something is missing.

[NONSTOP DEBATE; BEGIN.]

ANGEL: So we've established what happened…

CONNOR: ...So what's missing?

SNEEG: Well, he froze to death. He got bonked real hard.

SCHLATT: The weapon is a blunt object…

TRAVIS: And he was knocked out in Poke's room.

ALTRIVE: How do you know he was knocked out?

TRAVIS: Uh, well, the- the stain on the floor kinda tells. Plus, he was dragged. He fell on the floor, unconscious.

WILBUR: We know about the murder weapon is anyways… What and where it is... God, this is hard…

POKE: So what the hell is missing?

[BREAK!]

COOPER: …

COOPER: ...Wilbur, what do you mean, where?

WILBUR: Uh- well, where as in- um-

SCHLATT: Wilbur, you, uh, you got something to share?

WILBUR: …

WILBUR: …

WILBUR: …

SNEEG: Spit it out! You said where, where is the murder weapon?

WILBUR: ...There's only one guitar missing from my- my talent room.

SCHLATT: What the hell is that supposed to mean, Will-?!

WILBUR: …It-

WILBUR: It means that since there's only one guitar missing, and- and none of you ever found the guitar…

WILBUR: It means that it's backstage. In the concert hall.

SCHLATT: ...So- So what are you saying, Wilbur?

WILBUR: I'm saying I did it, Schlatt!

SCHLATT: …

COOPER: …I- are you sure? You gotta be bluffing.

WILBUR: I'm not gonna l-let this trial run on forever. I confess right here, right now.

WILBUR: I killed Charlie. I- I killed Charlie because I thought he was the mastermind.

SCHLATT: Wilbur…

WILBUR: He was typing out weird things about us in Poke's lab. I- I guess to try and incriminate him…

POKE: Damn, everyone's going after me.

WILBUR: So- So I thought he was running the place. I knocked him out with one of the guitars hanging on a rack in my talent room. I looked through the computer files, and… And-

GURE-GA: I'm gonna stop you there! Wilbur killed Charlie, he threw him into the freezer and refused to listen to his cries for help! Charlie died alone and afraid in that freezer, aaaaall thanks to Wilbur! No more about these files! Vote, vote, vote!

»»————- ☠ ————-««

The same slot machine rises from the center of the floor, whirring as the votes were submitted. The slots click noisily as all three of them slide to Wilbur's face. The guitarist just looks down at his feet in silent shock.

Schlatt looks a mix of completely devastated and angry.

"Wilbur..?! Wilbur, god fucking damnit! You idiot! I can't believe this! You- You-?! You fucking killed Charlie? You..?" His anger slowly fades to dismay, the sharp features on his face softening into one of complete hopelessness.

"I- I'm really sorry, Schlatt. I- I commited a crime for no reason. Guess I'm a.. a dirty crime boy." He smiles sadly.

"Shut the fuck up, no time for jokes! You failed me, you- you failed the company, Wilbur! You failed me!" He goes back to angry, adjusting his suit aggressively. He looks to be holding back tears.

Wilbur nods slowly, eyes squeezed tight.

"...I know you're trying not to cry, Schlatt. It's fine. It's okay, I- I know I failed. Please… Try not to be upset."

As soon as Wilbur ended his sentence, Gure-ga yawns loudly.

"Alright, alright! Wilbur really did kill Charlie, you guys are smaaart! Almost smart enough to realize the reward, I can assume! Wilbur killed a traitor, a super special someone acting as a molerat for our super special mastermind! Spoiler alert, the mastermind is one of your very own friends! Ohohoho!" It jumps up and down.

"Because Wilbur murdered someone, you get a video tape hand delivered to your bedroom! Whatever's in it, I can't say! Nooow, time for the maaaain event! Say goodbye, Willy!"

Wilbur waves a sad goodbye, and gets tripped by a chain. The floor opens up underneath him, and he slides down into the hole. The TVs in the main hall kick on once more.

»»————- ☠ ————-««

Wilbur falls down far into a body of water, dragged into the bottom of the watery abyss. Holding his breath, he simply sits and observes. The water is filled with brilliant and colorful marine life, a cod fish swimming around Wilbur and swimming off. The scenery could be considered beautiful, serene almost.

As Wilbur struggles with keeping in air, the burn in his lungs becomes almost unbearable. He can't die. He doesn't want to die. Not yet. He thrashes, swimming up. He flails upward, and he's a few feet away from the surface before the tug on his ankle stops him.

The chain wraps tightly and he's tugged back down to the middle of the water. He flails harder, but the chain only squeezes harder on his ankle. Wilbur can feel a sharp sting as the chain cuts into his ankle, the water around him turns a deep red. He stops flailing, going limp. His vision blurs, and water fills his mouth, his nose, his lungs.

He can't breathe. He can't breathe, and as the last remaining bits of warmth in his chest dies out, as he gives up to the water, a large swordfish swims at full speed towards him. Wilbur can only watch in horror as the swordfish refuses to slow down, and ultimately gets impaled through the neck as the swordfish speeds right for him. His vision blurs, and soon blood joins the water flowing into his lungs.

»»————- ☠ ————-««

The trial room was eerily silent. Cooper could hear Schlatt storming off, his two goons trailing behind him.

He feels sick again.

Travis tugs on his shirt this time.

"Hey… Let's just go back to your room, okay?"

He can't help but agree.

CHAPTER 003: WHO ARE YOU REALLY

»»————- ☠ -————««

Cooper swings his legs on his bed idly as he stares at the tape in his hands. It's marked up hastily with "COOPER" scribbled on a piece of masking tape. He bounces it between his hands and sighs, looking at the newly wheeled in TV in his room. Upon arriving at his room, he noticed that both he and his fellow captives had a small TV on a cart in all of their rooms. Reminded him of the TVs in middle school.

He peels the masking tape back a little absentmindedly as he stares off. Might as well get this over with. He hops of his bed. He turns the TV on, the static buzz droning through the silent bedroom. The tape slides into the player, and after some whirring, the TV lights up.

Cooper finds himself staring down a blank black screen, with the faint red blink of the recording symbol in the corner. The audio was just leaves brushing, twigs snapping, and panting. Someone was running. Just the audio was making him anxious.

The blank screen quickly pans up into what looks to be… The side of a highway. A car is pulled over, and there are a few men of varying of panic swarmed around what looks to be a corpse. All of their faces seem to be obscured, except for Cooper's.

He tenses up and gasps, his breathing picking up. That was him. This dream was real.

The chubby boy goes down first as a person dressed in all black stabs what looks to be a tranquilizer dart into him. He staggers before falling unconscious. One of the taller boys attempts to throw a punch at the increasing number of assailants. He inevitably falls unconscious as well. The other tall boy stumbles backwards after a slam to his head, blood soaking his blonde hair. The final boy next to him falls back and vomits after getting struck with a separate needle in the neck.

Cooper can see himself get shot in the thigh with a dart and keel over. The boy that was stuck in the neck convulses and continues to vomit, shaking and bleeding out of his eyes and nose. The camera zooms in, and while Cooper can't recognize him, he grimaces in disgust at the vomit and blood in his beard. Still alive, surprisingly, he spits an inaudible insult at the person standing in front of him. He stares defiantly into their eyes as a gun is leveled at his forehead. His head jerks back as the bullet hits the other end of his skull, and he falls limp, succumbing to both the violent poison and the gunshot.

The camera continues to record as the person holding the gun docks it back into its sling at their hip. They turn around to bark orders, and the camera moves further into the scene, zooming out.

Standing over the corpse of the bearded man is a man in a ram's mask. Tugging it off reveals a face all too familiar to Cooper by now, a man with short, dark brown hair and squared facial features. He turns back to the others, all masked with various Halloween masks. One walks back to the corpse already laid on the roadside, the one Cooper faintly remembers as Joko. The masked person shakes his head and pulls up on his hair, and slowly, ever so slowly…

Joko's eyes wearily flutter open. He wiggles out of the person's grasp and pushes himself off the ground, coughing and sputtering up bile. He wheezes and looks over at the masked figures.

"I… I did what you asked. Please- Please just let me go home, please-!! I don't know how long I've been gone, A-Amanda, she-"

"You don't need to worry about that right now." Schlatt growls.

The masked people swarm around Joko, and the camera's view of the bruised and bloodied man cuts off. Only the view of Schlatt's back turned.

"We need you one last time for this game. Remember the reward he talked about after your game? Consider this… extra payment."

As Schlatt reaches for his gun, the camera cuts off.

Cooper's left in a shocked silence, and he immediately looks around the room in worry. Alone. He's alone. Is he ever really alone anymore?

He peeks out of his door and sighs. Everyone's doors are closed. It doesn't look like everyone returned to their rooms either. He looks at some of the uncollected tapes in front of some people's doors and immediately gets an idea.

He slowly moves out of his room and shuts the door, stepping out and looking into the hallways, specifically for tapes. The deceased's tapes all remain in front of their doors, despite being dead. That, and Schlatt, Connor, and Ty's tapes remain in front of their doors. Cooper quickly collects the tapes and heads back to his room as he hears footsteps from down the hall.

He shuts the door and throws the tapes onto his bed, and immediately pops in Schlatt's. The tape whirs, and flashes on to reveal a tape filming on a table, aimed towards a meeting room. Two figures are somewhat seen through an opaque window, and they finish discussing something before shaking hands. The door opens, and out steps Schlatt.

"Pleasure working with you." He calls out behind him as he turns to leave.

Oddly enough, the camera rotates to follow him.

Schlatt goes to push the door open before being shot in the back by a dart. He stumbles forward and turns back around.

"I- I thought we had a deal! You… You can't just psyche me out, you can't… You…" And the businessman falls to the floor.

Cooper pops the tape out in complete an utter shock. Was Schlatt behind everything? Is he actually the traitor? Is Schlatt the mastermind?

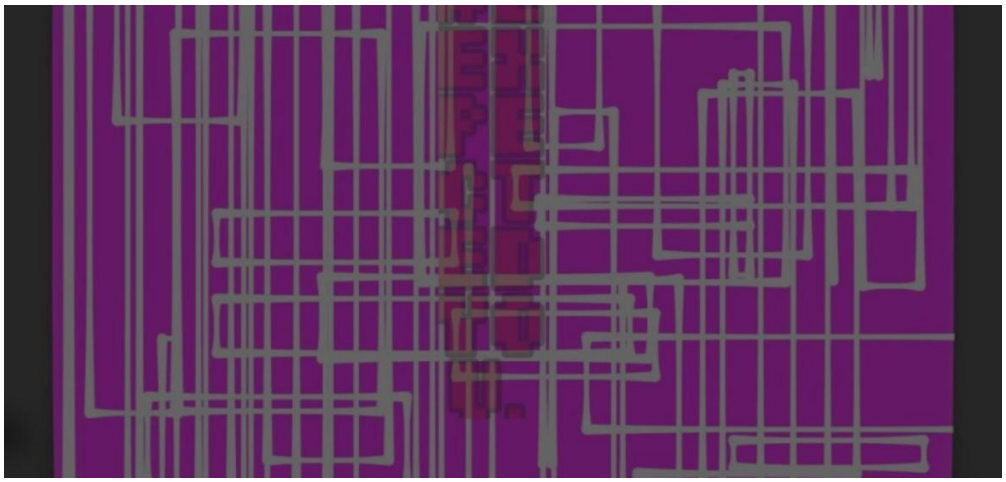
His head swims as he pops in Carson's tape, and is only met with distorted footage. The tape ejects itself, oddly enough. The same with Charlie's, Gold's, and Wilbur's. However, on Charlie's taps, Cooper could catch brief glances of security footage showing Charlie tapping at the computer moments before his death.

He turns the TV off afterwards, not even bothering with Connor's and Ty's tapes. He collects the tapes and shoves them into his closet, save for his own tape, which he opts to balance over his knee and snap in half.

This Joko person is still alive, and somehow, is connected with both him and Schlatt and, potentially, everyone else here. Cooper pulls his hoodie on and heads straight for the computer lab.

He needs to get to the bottom of this.

PART 2: THE FALLING OF STRUCTURE



»»————- ☠ ————-««

Cooper marches himself to the computer lab to find it, luckily, empty. He looks around and sighs, sitting at a random computer and clicking around. The computer comes out of sleep mode and Cooper looks at the screen.

It's relatively barren, save for a writing program and a few other files and programs. He goes to click on a program, and is met with map layouts of the first, second, and third floor. He clicks on the third floor map and scans through the newly unlocked infirmary rooms and storage closet. Not much added. He clicks on the second floor to look at the talent rooms, concert hall and the computer lab he currently resided in. The first floor reveals the layout of the dorms, halls, bathrooms, cafeteria, furnace, and a locked room. Cooper attempts to click on the room.

Clicking on the room, surprisingly, leads to security camera footage. It's blacked out and full of static, of course, but it's security footage. He exits out of the map and clicks on Travis' room. It's empty. He clicks on his own room. Empty. He's almost relieved. He clicks on the main hall. Schlatt and Connor are having a quiet conversation about something he can't hear, while Ty keeps watch.

He moves to the second floor and clicks on the hallway to the concert hall. Ryan and Altrive are happily chatting away about something as Ryan scribbles something in his notebook. He clicks

into the talent room hallways, and clicks through various talent rooms. Most were empty, save for Poke, who was sprawled out on the floor and listening to music already loaded into one of the computers, and Angel, who, surprisingly, was sitting at a desk and looking through various files of something.

Confused, Cooper attempts to zoom into the scene. He manages to find the right button and zooms in closer, and reels back slightly in shock.

Angel was viewing a case file of 16 recorded disappearances. Several sentences were blacked out, but Cooper could see clear as day a picture of his and Travis' face, among several others, including Angel's herself.

"Holy shit…" He whispers.

Quickly, he clicks off her room and exits out of the program. He opens a random file on the desktop, and is met with several pictures and videos of the various participants in the game. Ryan and Altrive together in front of a large, medieval modeled building, Schlatt, Connor and Ty smiling, posed together in a picture, Poke and, oddly enough, Sneeg, sat on a hotel bed together holding convention pass badges. Cooper closes out of the file before he can see whatever pictures this sick mastermind managed to grab from his personal life.

A few other files were encrypted, and the writing program held nothing of importance to him. However, clicking on a small red icon in the corner of the computer led to turning his computer off, the screen going black in front of his eyes.

Or, at least, that's what he expected.

What he didn't expect was to see the screen flash white and pink, garbling out distorted unintelligible speech from the speakers. He jumps back in surprise and attempts to turn the computer off, to no avail.

The computer stops its noise, stops its flashing, leaving Cooper with a black screen. Slowly, slowly, red text starts to flash onto the screen.

'WE EXPECTED YOU, COOPER.'
'THANK YOU FOR VIEWING.'
'TELL ME, COOPER,'
'WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER?'

His throat tightens and he stands up and away from the computer.

"What the fuck- I- What did I do?! Who the fuck are you!" He yelps at the screen.

'WE CAN HEAR YOU.'

‘WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER?’

He looks back at the computer with pure horror and disgust.

“I- I- I remember- I remember driving with people in- in a car. We saw- saw this dude on the side of the road… Then we got- we got jumped. Schlatt was there, he was there! He’s the mastermind! He’s gotta be!”

Cooper can almost hear a chuckle from the speakers.

‘YOU ARE FALSE.’
‘SO, SO FALSE.’
‘TELL ME, COOPER,’
‘DO YOU REMEMBER THIS?’

The screen flashes white, and a video begins to load. Cooper holds back a sob at the video.

The video displayed him, Travis, and Carson, along with the bearded man from his tape. They were laughing, having a fun time at what looked like a convention. Cooper points the camera at Travis. He flushes and bats at the camera. Carson cracks a joke, and the group cackles. The video cuts off, and the same red text is displayed.

‘WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER?’

Cooper reacts by slipping his sneaker off and chucking it full force at the screen, the shoe bouncing off and the computer wobbling.

‘WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER?’

“Shut up! Shut the fuck up-!!”

‘WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER?’

His head hurts so bad.

“Shut the fuck UP! Stop it! Stop it, Get out- Get out of my head-!!”

“Cooper..?”

The screen is black when he looks back at it, his own reflection showing himself with puffy eyes and tears still welling at his eyes. He looks back at the doorway. Travis, Ryan and Altrive peek in with varying degrees of worry on their faces.

Travis steps in first, calmly, quietly, and approaches the blonde.

“Cooper, Coop, are you alright..? Talk to me, Coop. It’s okay, calm down…” He mutters.

Cooper’s lip quivers and he dives into Travis’ arms, who just responds with an “oof”.

Ryan and Altrive step in and attempt to offer a sense of comfort. Altrive examines the computer previously flashing in front of Cooper. He turns it on.

“There’s nothing on here, Cooper. Was that what you were yelling at? Were you just having a breakdown, or..?” He asks, but Ryan gives him a look.

Cooper looks back at the computer and gasps in surprise. There’s nothing there. The computer had been wiped clean.

Travis rubs circles into his back and Ryan looks on with sympathy as Cooper just squeezes his eyes shut.

“D’you wanna talk about it..?” Ryan offers.

Cooper shakes his head. It’s best to keep this to himself, after all. This could send everyone else into a panic. He didn’t want that for anyone. Though, to him, it’s only a matter of time before this gets out to everyone else.

PART 3

»»————- ☠ -————««

Cooper sighs into his cold can of beans as he sits in the cafeteria, legs folded on the chair and staring off into space. Travis, Ryan and Altrive had suggested to take his mind off of whatever he was freaking out over, so here he sits, wrapped in Travis’ baby blue comforter and eating an uncooked can of beans. Truly one of the peaks in his life.

Travis, Ryan and Altrive were idly chatting away in the kitchen as they retrieved more food, and occasionally Travis would peek his head into the cafeteria to check on Cooper. Cooper would always see him, but would pretend not to. He felt weak, being monitored and cared for like this. Whatever he saw was his problem to deal with.

Travis comes back with a mug of hot chocolate, odd considering Cooper was currently eating beans. Travis gives Ryan and Altrive a look, and the pair leave the room, talking quietly.

“Cooper..? Coop, do you trust me enough to- to tell me what happened?” Travis asks softly.

Cooper just slides the can of beans onto the table. Come to think of it, they tasted horrible. He grimaces.

“I- I guess. Why the hell do you care so much, man? It wasn’t even that bad, I was just overreacting.” His throat tightens.

“Coop, it’s alright. You probably weren’t overreacting. To tell you the truth, I- I kinda had a freakout the first couple nights we were here. I was so scared.” He hums.

“We all were! We all were, then people started murdering, and now we’re all just sitting ducks.” He growls. Travis flinches.

“...I’m sorry.” He mumbles, and pulls the comforter off.

“It’s fine, Coop. Can you tell me what… what actually happened?” Travis asks, scooting in closer.

“...Yeah. I- I went into the computer lab to find something out about this- this guy named Joko. I saw him in a dream, and the tape- the tape I got showed him on there, so it showed me that he was real. He was really real! S-So I went to the computer lab to try and see if there were any records of him here. I found a program that- that showed the security camera footage of every room. Then, I- I found a file that- It had…-” He trails off, and Travis taps at his shoulder.

“What was on it, Coop?” He asks quietly.

“There- There were pictures. Pictures of us, Travis. Of us, and of Sneeg and Poke, and Schlatt and- Schlatt, he’s suspicious, he’s gotta be working with the mastermind, he-“

“Cooper, don’t work yourself up, okay?” He hums, and Cooper nods.

“We all have a connection, Travis. One way or another we all know each other, and none of us know how. I- I mean sure, Schlatt and Connor and Ty know each other, and- and somehow, Poke and Sneeg know each other, hell, even Techno knows Schlatt co. to a degree. And- isn’t it funny, isn’t it so funny how none of us remember anything other than the basics? Travis, we- I-“ He bites his tongue.

‘We knew each other,’ he wants to say. ‘Me and you and Carson all knew each other, we were friends, and now it’s just us because we sentenced Carson to death and Charlie froze to death.’

“Nevermind,” He ends up saying, “it isn’t worth it.” Travis doesn’t press further.

“The computer, back to the computer, it- it flashed. It said things to me, it told me to remember, it- it kept telling me things.”

Travis raises his eyebrows in surprise. He jerks back a little.

“What did it say, Coop..?” He asks.

“What do you remember. It said what do you remember. Freaky red text and all.” He mumbles.

“Oh, Cooper… Coop, I- I’m sorry. I think that was just someone messing with you. ‘m sorry that it freaked you out that bad.”

The pair sits in silence for what feels like ages.

“...Do you think it would make you feel better if I told you what was on my tape?” Travis asks.

“What? Aren’t they like, personal things? It might be like, sensitive info.” Cooper questions, lip curled.

“Wha’? No, no, it’s okay man. It’s not that bad. It- It was a home movie. It was me, ‘nd my mom and my sister. We were out back and mom was filming me killing spiders. Not as bad as you would think, y’know. We- We were laughing and stuff, ‘nd my sister said spiders were gross, and I threw my slides at her,” He giggles.

“Uh… Then the footage cut to- to like a guy dangling a spider over a fire, and- and then it was gross little insects crawling out of skin, then- then it was spiders in someone’s mouth… Grossest thing I’ve ever seen.” He grimaces.

“Oh, I- Sorry, dude. That’s gross.” He nods.

The conversation lulls, and they sit in silence again. Travis smiles at Cooper, and the blonde gives a small smile back.

Travis looks away and goes to say something, but the thumping of incoming steps and the eventual bursting open of the door interrupted the boy. It was Sneeg, with Poke lagging behind, heaving air into his lungs.

“Guys- Cooper, Trav, dude- there’s- in the concert hall, in the concert hall!”

“There’s a bo-“

“A body has been discovered!”

PART 4: BODY DISCOVERY

»»————- ☠ ————-««

Poke and Sneeg had dragged Travis and Cooper out of the cafeteria and up the stairs, heading into the propped open doors of the concert hall. Cooper walks ahead of Travis, and finds that everyone was standing around or on the stage, with Schlatt and Connor in particular fretting over the body.

Remarkably enough, the body was hung, suspended by its ankle about seven inches or so above the stage by a thick rope. Cooper's eyes trail up the rope to see that it was tied to the fly system above the stage. Schlatt starts to yell.

"Who the fuck killed him, huh? Huh?! Who the fuck killed the kid! I'll bash yer fuckin' teeth in!" He yelps, whipping his head around to face the others.

Cooper finally looks down at the body, and sees why Schlatt and Connor were truly taking this hard.

Ty was suspended by the rope, his hoodie thrown off to the side. Several long cuts were displayed on his arms, and a deep bruise was around his neck in a ring. Blood was caked under his nails, among the other dirt and bruises on his body, and his mask was placed underneath him.

Connor lets out a choked sob, unable to stand there any longer. The man reaches for the rope and attempts to wrestle it away from Ty's ankle, loosening it and making the boy fall to the floor. He reels back and gasps, and both him and Schlatt dive for the intern's body.

Schlatt picks him up and clutches him close, fighting back tears. Cooper almost feels bad.

"Which one of you motherfuckers killed him! How old is he, huh?! Sixteen? One a' you killed a kid!" He hisses.

Angel looks down and bites her lip, then off to the side.

"Schlatt, with all do respect… I think you and Connor should step out of the investigation. Go stay in your rooms for a bit." She sighs.

Connor goes to bite back before stopping and nodding.

"She's… got a point, Schlatt. Come on." He pats the businessman's shoulder, who just lets out an ugly sob.

“When I find out who killed the kid, you won’t be able to run fast enough from me.” His steely gaze scans through the crowd, eyes swimming with tears as he carefully drops Ty’s body to the stage and turns to leave.

The pair leave slowly, Schlatt hanging by the door of the concert hall a little longer, staring back at the stage. He makes a face, something Cooper can identify as one of pure, genuine distress and sorrow, and follows Connor out of the concert hall. Cooper turns back and sighs.

“Alright… I guess we can start investigating.” Angel hums soberly.

The others make general noises of agreement and split up into their usual groups; Ryan and Altrive start by peering backstage, Poke and Sneeg hop off the stage and look around the house. Angel and Techno group together and go to leave the concert hall, and Ted moves to Travis and Cooper. He gives a small smile, and Travis reciprocates with a wave.

“Hey. That- That whole scene, huh.” He sighs.

Cooper nods.

“Yeah. Uh, listen, check this out.” Ted jabs a thumb to the side of the stage.

Ted walks over to the side of the stage, and pulls the bunched up red curtain to the side.

“A ladder. Big one. Like, real big.”

Cooper looks over, and indeed, peeking out of a curtain is a large ladder reaching the fly system of the stage. Ted tries to lift the ladder, but only gets half of it about an inch off the ground. He stumbles back, and sighs.

“I’m sure you can get where I’m gettin’ with this.” He folds his arms.

Travis and Cooper look at each other, then back to Ted in confusion.

“Uh. No.” Travis voices both of their thoughts.

“I’m saying that the ladder was too heavy for one person to carry. Carrying that thing is a two man job, at the very least. You get where I’m coming from? Two people did this. Two people are at large, or at least, one person doin’ the dirty work and one person doing the crime.” He explains.

Cooper presses his lips together and nods.

“You got a point. Do you think anyone here is strong enough to lift it? Like, it could be one really strong person.” Cooper suggests.

“Nah. I’ve looked at everyone here, this was a two man job. Think of it. One person holds the ladder and the other ties Ty up.” Ted points to the fly system.

“Hey- Hey, I found something!” Sneeg calls out from the other end of the auditorium, interrupting the conversation.

Cooper hops off the stage, followed by Travis and Ted, headed to Sneeg, crouched on the floor and holding something.

“Right by the door. Check it out.” He lifts up a walkie talkie, and a blue sneaker.

“The sneaker was jammed in the door to keep it open, and the walkie talkie was right there next to the door. Someone lured Ty in here, and they used the walkie talkie, bet.” Sneeg explains.

“That backs up the two person job theory I had.” Ted chimes in.

Sneeg’s eyes widen in slight confusion.

“Two people..? Why would you need two people to kill a kid?” Poke questions.

“Maybe Ty was a fighter.” Sneeg answers.

“I guess. Hey, if there’s a walkie talkie here, there should be another one somewhere, right? I’m gonna turn this on-”

Static churns over the intercom, and Gure-ga cackles.

“Alrighty! Everyone please head to the main hall for our third trial! Chop chop!”

Sneeg looks up and grimaces.

“That was quicker than expected.” He hums, but leaves the concert hall anyways.

Poke follows, followed by Cooper, Travis and Ted, with Ryan and Altrive finally coming out from backstage and catching up.

The group get to the main hall downstairs and stand at their respective podiums once more. Schlatt and Connor are present, but not willingly it seems.

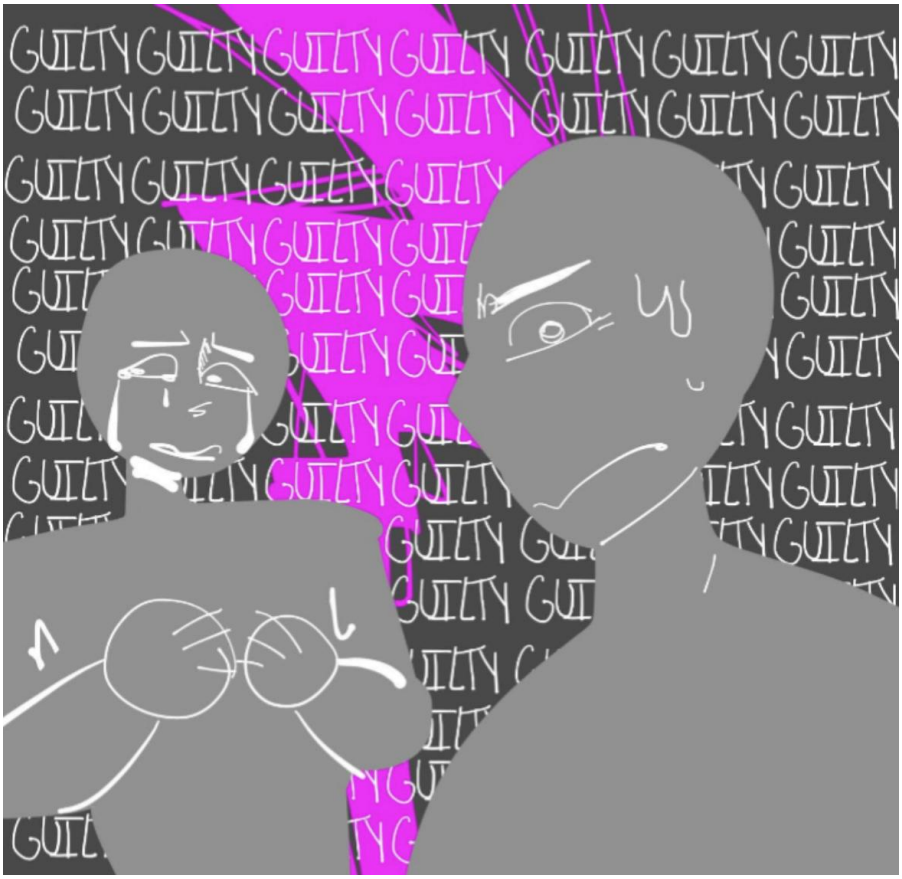
“Had to drag these two debby downers outta their rooms!” The moth laughs.

Cooper gives a sympathetic look to Connor, who continues to look at the floor with a hard gaze.

Cooper sighs and clenches his fists, leaning on the podium.

“Let the third trial commence! Ohoho!”

PART 5: TRIAL AND EXECUTIONS



»»————- ☠ -————««

ANGEL: So, I feel like this one was a bit more complicated.

RYAN: How so?

ANGEL: I barely found any evidence outside of the concert hall.

ALTRIVE: Damn, that sucks. Me and Ryan didn’t find anything backstage, either.

TED: Uh- If I may, I got a pretty plausible theory as to why.

TECHNO: How so?

TED: I think it was a two person job.

RYAN: A two person job? To kill one person. Ty must've been a fighter…

SNEEG: That's what I said!

SCHLATT: …

TRAVIS: Oh. 'm sorry, Schlatt.

TED: ...Uh. Well, there's barely any evidence, I think because there was someone else to clean up. Think about it, the reason that Carson got caught was because he didn't clean up the evidence properly. To avoid that from being the case here, the killers worked quick in disposing everything.

SNEEG: You make a fair point.

TED: And to, uh, add onto that? The ladder on stage. It was too heavy for one person to carry. Which means that it was at least a two person act carrying it.

TECHNO: Are you sure?

TED: I tried picking it up, and I barely got it up off the ground.

TRAVIS: It's true, I saw.

ANGEL: So… There we have it. A two person job.

SNEEG: You know, I also found a blue sneaker propping the door open, along with a walkie talkie. So, I came to believe that Ty was lured into the auditorium.

ANGEL: The storage door was open, now that I think about it. The killers must have got it from there.

RYAN: Is that it? Is that all the evidence? You think we should try piecing this together, because this case feels like it's at a stand still.

COOPER: Yeah… I got nothing. Though, did anyone find any other walkie talkie?

ALTRIVE: No, unfortunately. I think the killers disposed of it.

TECHNO: So? Why does this case feel so empty?

[NONSTOP DEBATE; BEGIN.]

SNEEG: There's something here that we aren't getting…

POKE: You said that last time, smartass. I think that the killers are just smarter than the last two.

RYAN: Yeah, we worked ourselves into a corner with this one.

ANGEL: You know…

ALTRIVE: What?

ANGEL: I think I got something. There were bandages in the storage. I know because there was a box on the floor near the door. A box that had the bandages in them.

SNEEG: So? You think that Ty did some damage?

ANGEL: Yeah.

ANGEL: In fact,

ANGEL: Altrive. Why don't you roll up your sleeves for us?

[BREAK!]

ALTRIVE: W-What?

ANGEL: You heard me. Roll your sleeves up.

ALTRIVE: Why? Are you accusing me or some shit?

ANGEL: Maybe I am.

ALTRIVE: I'm not rolling my sleeves up, fuck off. That's a stupid proposition.

ANGEL: By not rolling your sleeves up, you're only proving yourself suspicious.

RYAN: Come on, Altrive, just-- just cooperate.

ALTRIVE: …

ALTRIVE: Fine.

[ALTRIVE rolls his jacket sleeves up. His arms are spotless.]

ALTRIVE: There. See? That's a stupid method of ra-

ANGEL: Ryan. How about you?

RYAN: Huh-? Well- Well I'm always scratched up and stuff, so this isn't really-

ANGEL: Do it, please?

[RYAN hesitates, but he rolls his sleeves up.]

[Cuts are littered around his arms, along with several bruises. What sticks out, though, are three wide bandaids covering a wound.]

ANGEL: …

ANGEL: You know, I never said what the bandages looked like.

[ANGEL holds up the box that the bandages came from. The ones on RYAN are identical to the ones advertised on the box.]

ALTRIVE: That- That doesn't prove anything!

ANGEL: It's certainly a start.

ALTRIVE: Back off, lady, we didn't do anything!

SCHLATT: …

SCHLATT: ...We?

CONNOR: So it was you two.

ALTRIVE: NO!

RYAN: Altrive- Altrive, give it up, already.

ALTRIVE: No! No, I object, this is bullshit!

SNEEG: Can you object to this?

[SNEEG presents the walkie talkie from the concert hall. He turns it on. It works..?]

SNEEG: You two killed Ty. Over.

[SNEEG'S voice crackles from Ryan's pocket. ANGEL leans over and wrestles something out of his hoodie pocket. A walkie talkie.]

SNEEG: Bingo.

SCHLATT: You two did it?! You fucking killed him, didn't you? Didn't you?!

RYAN: ...I'm sorry, Schlatt, I'm so sorry.

ALTRIVE: Maybe if you cleaned up after yourself, we wouldn't be on the edge of death.

RYAN: Please- Please just let me explain myself!

COOPER: Go on.

RYAN: I- It- I just helped Altrive with killing Ty! I didn't deliver the killing blow! I didn't strangle him to death! Altrive did that! I- I- I set up the plan, but Altrive killed him! Please- P-Please, I don't wanna die, A-Altrive wanted me to help him, please!

TRAVIS: He- He does have a point, guys…

SCHLATT: Fuck no! Kill the bastard! Kill him!

GURE-GA: Ohohoho! Looks like we got ourselves a dilemma!

GURE-GA: To make this more fun, how about you kiddies vote on a poll? Eh?

RYAN: W-What?

GURE-GA: Altrive will be executed for the murder of Ty, but you will get to decide whether or not Ryan dies!

GURE-GA: He won't get away unscathed, of course, but his life is even more in your hands than Altrive! Ohohoho!

RYAN: O-Oh my god, oh- oh fuck… Guys- Guys, please, I- I didn't kill Ty. I didn't! I- I just he-helped Altrive, please-

CONNOR: Oh, shut the hell up! Just shut up! He doesn't deserve to live, he- he could have ratted Altrive out from the beginning! You helped a murderer and didn't say anything!

ALTRIVE: You threw me under the bus at the last minute, asshole!

COOPER: You’re being a little- a little harsh, dude.

GURE-GA: Gah! Just can it! Vote already!

»»————- ☠ ————-««

The votes swarmed in rather quickly, and the slot machine in the center buzzed louder. The slots quickly spinned to Altrive’s face. Meanwhile, the TV switched on, revealing Ryan’s ultimate fate.

On the screen, Ryan’s face was covered by a green circle, and the words ‘LIVE’ underneath it.

Ryan gets to live.

Along with that, the votes of his fate were displayed to the side of the screen, along with who voted for what. The ‘LIVE’ and ‘DIE’ were nearly tied 5 to 5, with the deciding vote being… Cooper’s, it seemed.

“You- You! I’m gonna fucking kill you two!”

Cooper whips his head from the screen to see that Schlatt had launched himself at Altrive, the other collapsing to the floor as Schlatt clenched his fists and beat Altrive’s face with wide, heavy swings. Altrive didn’t bother to fight back as Schlatt slammed his fist into his eye. He wasn’t stopped by anyone until Ted grabbed Schlatt and pulled him to the side. Connor was immediately stopped by Sneeg from pressing forward.

“Alright! Alright, calm down! Please!” Gure-ga howls over the commotion.

“Let’s get this done and over with…” Ryan sniffles. He had backed himself against the wall to avoid the fight, but still looked wounded anyhow. On the inside, at least.

As if on cue, two separate chains come up from behind the two murderers. Ryan and Altrive are dragged to the opposite ends of the main hall, and thrown into the same inky black the previous killers were thrown into.

»»————- ☠ ————-««

Altrive is dragged into a white room, a ladder presented to him and a large statue stretching to the top of the ceiling. On the ground is a small note. Picking it up, it reads one thing written in red ink.

‘CLIMB.’

The floor quivers, and Altrive quickly clings to the ladder as the floor itself begins sinking down. Altrive starts to climb, however he climbs quickly away from the rapidly sinking floor. The faster he goes, the quicker the floor sinks. Altrive looks down to find that the floor was collapsing into sharp spikes, and thusly, began to panic and climb higher.

Altrive eventually makes it to the top, the smooth surface greeting him. He hurls himself onto the top of it and sighs, but his relief is short lived as the statue shakes. Altrive looks down to find that the statue was collapsing, and Altrive just screams as the statue finally collapses to the floor, falling into the floor of spikes.

Ryan, however, had been watching this happen all happen on a small TV with teary eyes. Ryan previously had been dragged into a rickety wooden room, door locked. As soon as Altrive falls, the TV cuts to static and the door opens.

Inside, Ryan is shoved into a structurally unstable room, floorboards cracked and decayed, gaps showing the large distance to the ground below. A TV flashes on the other side of the room.

‘NAVIGATE TO SAFETY.’

Ryan complies, shakily moving on a support beam. Avoiding rotted pieces of wood and gaps, he balances on the support beam and crosses with stable pieces of flooring.

He almost gets to the end. Almost.

His foot steps too hard onto a rotted piece of wood, and his ankle gets caught. Attempting to tug his ankle out results in him losing his balance.

Ryan slips, and crashes through the support beams. Down he goes, crashing through wood and falling into a seemingly endless oblivion. Ryan tumbles to the ground below, and a sickening crack is heard as he hits the ground.

»»————- ☠ ————-««

Cooper stares at the TV in a somber silence, and goes to turn away. The others start to leave, before Travis starts yelling.

“Hey- Hey-!! He’s alive! Ryan! He’s alive! He’s okay, guys!”

Cooper turns around to look at the TV, and indeed, Ryan is twitching on the floor, struggling to move. Cooper can see the shaky rise and fall of his chest.

“Holy shit, we- we gotta get him out of there!” Ted yells.

Cooper can hear Ryan start sobbing from the footage. It's barely intelligible, mostly panicked sobbing, but Cooper can make out a few phrases.

"My legs- holy shit-"

"I'm sorry, I'm s-sorry!"

"Please- A-Altrive- help, someone- help!"

Cooper's heart stops.

"Ohoho, I did say that he would live, didn't I? He's alive! He'll get here eventually, though."

»»————- ☠ ————-««

That night, the night of the trial convicting Ryan and Altrive, Cooper had watched in horror as Ryan had broken both of his legs. He watched as shortly after the boy was crying in pain, the floor opened up underneath him. He watched as the boy fell through, and after about a minute, was deployed through a hatch in the wall. It opened up, and the remaining surviving participants huddled around the construction planner, who was clutching to consciousness with short, rapid breaths and groans of pain.

Schlatt was ready to deliver a swift kick to Ryan's head, but Travis luckily stepped in between them and shoved Schlatt back.

"This- This isn't the place for this. We need to get him t-to the infirmary, or hopefully an actual hospital." He shakily defends, and Schlatt huffs.

"Ohoho! Who said he was free, hmm? No, no! I'll have my best duplicates take care of the poor sap!" Gure-ga cackles.

On cue, several more Gure-ga bots began to swarm the main hall. The participants were grabbed, tugged, shoved back as the bots surrounded Ryan, lifting him up on top of their heads as a makeshift gurney. He only lets out a weak groan and twitches in protest, but the bots move as a collective towards the infirmary.

Cooper looks on in pity as he's carried off upstairs. He looks back at the floor, and can make out a bloodstain where Ryan was laying. Poor guy. Poor, poor guy.

"In lighter news, you get one final floor to your name as a prize! Haha!" Gure-ga announces, and the TV flickers to a new map layout.

The only thing there unlocked was a bar, with the three other rooms being blacked out and presumably locked.

Cooper didn't care. Instead, he trudged back to his room that night with Travis at his heels like usual.

He didn't sleep that night.

CHAPTER 004: ALL ALONE

»»————- ☠ —————-««

Today, Cooper finally registers that it's morning when he can hear Travis stomping around next door. He blinks himself back to reality and slides out of bed, pressing an ear to his wall. Travis is mumbling and walking about, occasionally tripping over himself as heard by the louder thumps and groans. Typical Travis.

Cooper stretches, popping his back, putting on a shirt and walking out of the door to knock on Travis' door.

The boy opens the door slightly, and from what Cooper could see his room was a mess.

"Hey, Coop." Travis smiles.

"Hey, man. Listen, uh, I heard your banging around and shit. What's going on?" He asks.

"Oh, uh, 'm just lookin' for a key." Travis replies nonchalantly.

"A key? To what?" Cooper presses.

"Uh, I dunno. A couple days ago I found an envelope in front of my door. I opened it up, and a weird little key was in it! I was like, oh, what if the key goes to one of the unlocked rooms? So, 'm lookin' for it, then I realize I don't know where I put it." Travis explains.

Cooper stands on his toes to see above Travis' head and finds that a pristine red envelope is sitting on the dresser untouched.

"Uh. Turns out it's just sitting on your dresser, man." Cooper chuckles.

Travis whips around to face the dresser, and indeed, it's sitting there. He gasps.

"Are you kidding me?! I looked everywhere, man!" He shouts, and steps over a pile of shirts to retrieve the envelope.

He comes back and opens the door fully, handing Cooper the envelope. He opens it to find a small silver key. A skeleton key, in fact. Cooper hums in surprise and looks back at Travis.

“Let’s go see what it unlocks.” He says as soon as he makes eye contact with Travis.

Travis nods and rushes out, with Cooper following behind him. The pair head up the flight of steps to the newly unlocked fourth floor. Key in hand, Cooper stares at the closed doors. The entrance to the bar is wide open, but Cooper and Travis walk right past in favor of the locked door across from the bar.

Cooper fumbles for the key, and the key struggles for a bit before going successfully into the lock. Cooper turns the key, and a faint click is heard. The door opens with a creak. Cooper and Travis peak in with intrigue, and Cooper’s face furls into one of concern.

Inside the room is a room stocked wall to wall with… outdoor supplies. Sharp gardening prunes, hatchets, axes, scissors, gallons of pesticides and poisons, bear traps and other animal traps hung on the walls. The small room was one big death trap.

“Holy shit…” Travis whispers.

“Jesus fuck, dude. Let’s just- how about we just shut this door.” Cooper shuts the door.

The pair move onto the next door, and the skeleton key fits right in. Cooper opens the door to find the small room filled with TVs and other sorts of technology. Along with that, a few deactivated Gure-ga bots and skeletal wiring of other robots are piled in the room. Travis shudders.

“They’re like mannequins. Super cold and uncanny.” He observes.

“Fucking weird, but thanks for your imput.” Cooper chuckles.

The final locked room is a little ways down the hallway, a black door off to the side of the hallway. Cooper slides the key into the lock, and the door unlocks. Cooper peeks an eye in and swings the door open. His jaw almost drops.

Inside the room is several monitors lined up in front of a swivel chair. Cooper can see that they’re all set to the security cameras, along with one room Cooper didn’t recognize. He steps further into the room with Travis trailing behind, moving the chair to the side.

“O-Oh my god, oh my god…” Cooper wheezes.

The room in question would most likely be the locked room on the first floor, he thinks.

The room itself is nearly pitchblack, but Cooper can definitely make a figure out in the darkness. They turn to check something on a screen, and turns back to look directly at the security camera. The light from the screen illuminates their wide grin, and they quickly open the door and sprint out of the room.

Cooper spins around to face Travis, who was currently shaking in fear. Tears welled at the corners of his eyes as he rushes to shut the doors.

“D-Dude- I think we just fucking found the mastermind’s hideout.”

Cooper grabs the nearest heavy object, the robotic skull of a Gure-ga, and arms himself at the door in front of Travis.

Quickly, the footsteps approach the door, and stop directly at the door. Cooper’s breathing speeds up, and he reaches for the handle of the door.

“W-Wait- Cooper-” Travis starts.

Cooper has already swung the door open, and stares down the mastermind before him.

The figure was wearing a mask in accordance to Gure-ga, a gray moth mask encircling their head. There was no tell tale signs of gender, no point attributes, nothing.

Cooper goes to swing the robot head, but the figure quickly reached for the hilt of a nightstick placed in their pocket. They pull out and swing hard, knocking Cooper to the floor.

Cooper attempts to regain his balance, but the figure standing above him, the mastermind themselves, reaches down to Cooper’s neck. He can faintly feel a prick against his neck and he slips into a hazy unconsciousness.

The last thing he can make out is Travis yelling for help.

PART 2: GENESIS 3:4

»»————- ☠ ————-««

Cooper wakes up… in the infirmary. Oddly enough.

The first thing he registers is the fact that his face aches. Why, he doesn't remember. He reaches up to touch his face and pulls back his hand in surprise when he presses onto a nasty bruise.

He goes to sit up. His mouth feels dry. His head feels fuzzy.

Where has he felt this before..?

He shakes the thought out of his head when he looks over. In the bench opposite of the one Cooper was sprawled out on is Travis, holding an ice pack over his cheek. He looks over at Cooper and gives a small wave.

"Hey. Glad to see you're okay, man." He rasps.

Cooper blinks a few times and clutches his head.

“Yeah. What- What exactly happened..?”

Truth be told, Cooper can’t remember a damn thing. And by the looks of it, when Cooper asked, Travis jumped and panicked to think of something.

Cooper couldn’t remember what happened, and Travis did.

“Travis?” He presses.

“Uh- nasty fight. You got knocked out real hard. Rattled your brain.” He nods shakily.

Cooper furrows his brows together and huffs.

“Travis. What happened, what the hell is missing? You don’t just get knocked out and have total gaps in your memory.” He groans.

“Uh- man, I’m not a doctor, I don’t know!” He yelps.

Cooper goes to press further, but stop as the pounding in his head picks up. Something ruffles the curtains separating the childish nurse’s office-like setting and the hospital beds on the other end of the room.

Cooper looks to the curtains and stands up, drawing the curtains back.

He isn’t surprised to find Ryan tossing and turning in a restless sleep.

He opts to shake the boy out of his sleep.

Ryan quickly bolts up and shrieks. With bewildered eyes, he looks back at Cooper and his eye immediately fills with tears. He looks as if he hasn’t slept since the trial, eye weighed down with bags and red rimmed. Along with that, his usual patch has been discarded, displaying the milky white blankness of his other eye. Blinded, Cooper thinks.

“Y-You- Cooper, I- Altrive- Where..? Fuck, fuck, I’m so sorry-” He starts, heaving air into his lungs.

“R-Ryan, Ryan, it’s fine, you- I think you were having a nightm-”

“Altrive. Where is he.” He sniffles, staring hard into Cooper.

“A-Altrive? Ryan, he- Altrive was executed.” Travis stands up and chimes in.

“What? B-But- I just saw him fall, I didn’t- I didn’t see him die. Did he get the same treatment as me? Did he? He- He can’t be dead.” He rambles, voice wavering.

“Ryan, I- I’m really sorry. He killed someone, though. It- It had to happen. He was executed, dude.” Cooper sighs.

“No- N-No, you’re- fuck-!!” Ryan goes to attempt to move his lower half, but stops immediately.

“The- The fucking moth, it- it wants me to fucking suffer, man. The weird moth robots said that both my legs were fractured. My fucking legs are b-broken, among other things. I fell through a fucking building. Why- Why the hell am I not dead, Cooper?” He asks, desperation in his voice.

Cooper doesn’t know what to say. His mouth dries.

“I… I’m sorry, Ryan.” He murmurs quietly.

“...You know, I- I don’t blame you. I- I just kinda wish that Altrive didn’t have to suffer like that. I- I don’t know what to feel. Should I be dead right now, or- or did I get what was coming to me..?” He stares off.

Cooper doesn’t respond. He looks back at Travis. He looks upset.

“Cooper.”

A commanding voice comes from behind him.

Cooper spins around to find Schlatt and Connor in the doorway. Schlatt’s staring down Ryan, but Connor just gives a cool smile to Cooper.

“Can we talk?” Connor asks slyly, and his gaze briefly shifts to Travis, who looks away.

Cooper looks down for a minute, and looks back to Ryan, who stared at Schlatt with raw fear in his functioning eye.

“Um. Sure, man.” Cooper nods hesitantly, and Connor grabs his wrist, dragging him out of the infirmary.

The businessman yanks Cooper down the hall, away from the infirmary. Schlatt comes out of the room a second later, cracking his fists. His knuckles looked bruised.

“Cooper, we understand that you… Are a little lost. We just want to help you, you know.” Schlatt starts.

Connor nods.

“We saw you got attacked by someone. They injected a drug into your system, and it looks to me that it gets rid of recent memories as well when you get knocked unconscious. Did you know that?” Connor hums.

“I… No? I didn’t.” Cooper mumbles.

“Oh? Why didn’t Travis tell you? He didn’t get the drug in his system.” Schlatt shrugs.

“W-What? I didn’t know that either! Did he..?”

“See the whole thing? Yes. Does he remember who attacked you? Yes. But it doesn’t look like you can trust him, Cooper.” Connor chimes in.

Cooper’s face twists into a confused expression, and Schlatt elaborates.

“If Travis is hiding who attacked you, then what else could he be hiding? How did he really get that key of his? He could be the mastermind after all, since you’re so hellbent on figuring out who it is.” Schlatt sighs in mock concern.

Cooper takes that into consideration. Could he really trust Travis? Travis, the boy who stuck with him since the beginning? The boy that he knew on the outside of the game before getting his memories wiped?

Could Travis really be working for the mastermind..?

“Listen, Cooper. All we’re saying is to keep an eye out on him. He could be a little snake after all of this.” Connor adds.

The pair leave, leaving Cooper in a stunned silence. He couldn’t even trust Travis here, could he?

“Coop? What’s up?”

Travis peeks his head out of the doorway. Cooper jumps back, and looks back at the businessmen still walking away.

“Nothing, Trav.” He sighs, and walks back into the nurse’s office a little more paranoid.

PART 3

»»————- ☠ ————-««

Cooper had spent the past couple days rather alone, collapsing into a paranoid hole. At this point, anyone could be the mastermind. Anyone.

He blinks out sleep from his eyes as he sits in the dark of his room. It had to be early, nobody was up yet from what he could hear. So, Cooper did what he thought would pass time.

Cooper steps out of his room and heads up to the computer lab.

His steps are heavy, and he ends up trudging himself into the computer lab. With his previous experience in here, he avoided the room like the plague. But with the numbers thinning, Cooper needs answers. He needs reassurance.

Cooper needs the mastermind's identity.

He sits down in front of a different computer this time, and turns it on. The time read 2:35 AM. It really is early, huh, he thinks. The typical screen greets his tired eyes, and he clicks around the empty desk top.

He looks up at the security camera in the corner of the room and snarls.

"Listen here, bastard. I'm going to find you, and let it be known that I'm going to fuck you over so hard, you'll have to let us go. I'm not putting up with this game any longer. Who the fuck are you, huh?" His voice comes out in a whispered hiss.

The computer screen flickers, and Cooper shoots his gaze back at it.

The same red program appears in the corner of the screen, and Cooper's eyes widen.

"You cheeky bastard. I'm going to find you." He growls, and clicks the program.

The screen goes black, as expected, and the same flashing white and pink jump up, before the red text loads in again.

'YOU'RE SMART,'
'I LIKE THAT.'

Cooper groans.

"Don't be like that with me, smartass. You're going down." He spits.

'SO ANGRY, SO DETERMINED,'
'DETERMINED TO FIGHT SOMETHING,'

‘YOU CAN’T SEE.’

Cooper rolls his eyes.

“Charlie was working for you, wasn’t he? So is Schlatt. Who else do you have working for you here, huh-?!” He bangs the computer screen.

‘...’
‘CHARLIE WAS WORTHLESS TO ME,’
‘SCHLATT WAS JUST A PAWN,’
‘HE DOES NOT REMEMBER WORKING FOR ME,’
‘BUT PERHAPS HIS SUBCONSCIOUS DOES.’

Cooper sees red.

“So you /did/ wipe our memories, you scumbag! I’m gonna kill you-!!” He hollers.

‘NOW NOW,’
‘YOUR SUBCONSCIOUS YOU IS STILL THERE,’
‘BUT WE NEEDED FRESH STARTS FOR THIS GAME.’

Cooper starts shaking with rage at this point.

“You- You mean that everything I saw? That video with me and Travis? Those pictures on the computer? That fucking tape-?! That’s all real! I was right! I- I need to tell Travis, I need to get to him!” Cooper shoots up in his chair.

He looks over to the door, but it swings shut and locks. His breathing picks up.

‘AH AH AH,’
‘I’VE BEEN PLAYING A GAME WITH YOU,’
‘YOU WOULDN’T WANT TO LOSE,’
‘WOULD YOU COOPER?’

Cooper slowly sits back down in his chair, fists clenched.

‘IT SEEMS THAT,’
‘ONLY YOU KNOW ABOUT THESE ENCOUNTERS,’
‘THESE MEMORIES,’
‘IT’S ONLY YOU, COOPER.’

He scowls.

“That- That’s where you’re wrong. I told Travis everything. He knows, and you can’t do anything to silence us. Wouldn’t want to risk your pretty little anonymity, would you?” He spits.

‘...’
‘SMART BOY YOU ARE,’
‘HOW ABOUT THIS,’
‘SINCE YOU LOVE SPREADING THE WORD,’
‘SPREAD THIS.’

The screen turns black. For almost a minute, Cooper sits in silence, waiting.

He’s given what he was waiting for a second later.

The screen flashes to security camera footage of outside the bedrooms. Everything was in order, except…

‘A BODY HAS BEEN DISCOVERED.’

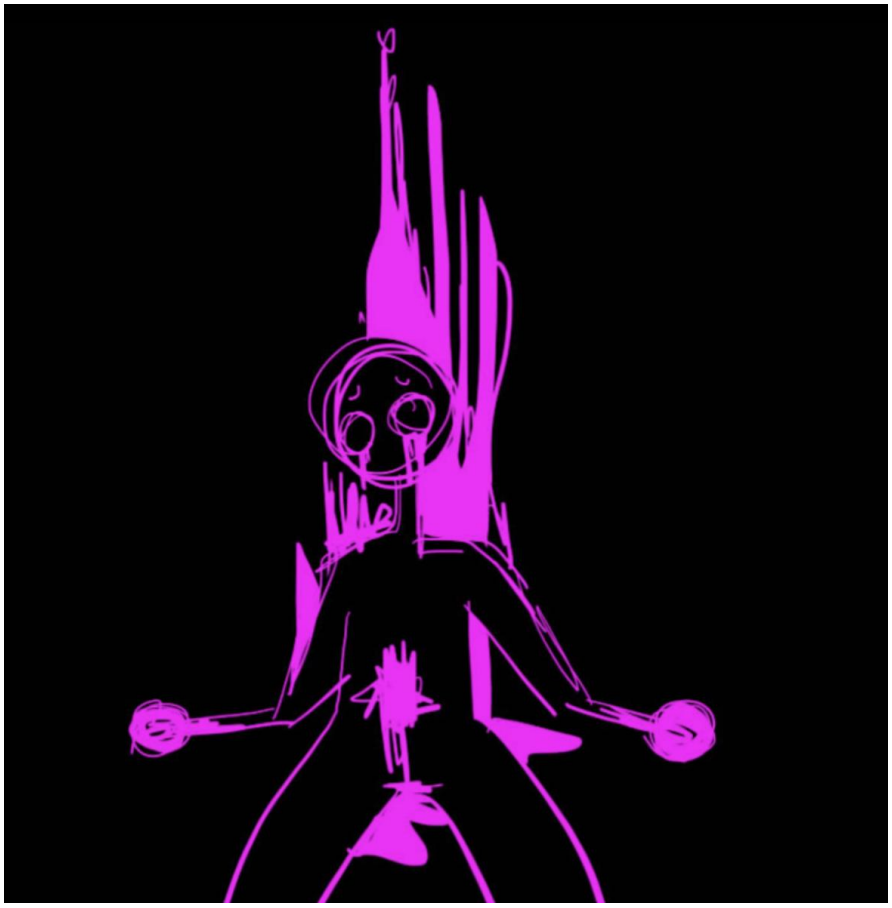
Cooper shoots up and yelps.

‘REMEMBER THIS, COOPER,’
‘TIL DEATH DO US PART.’

“S-Shut up! Shit shit shit-”

Cooper rushes for the door, and it swings open as he runs downstairs.

PART 4: BODY DISCOVERY



»»————- ☠ -————««

Cooper rushes downstairs to the bedroom hallway, nearly tripping on his own feet as he descends.

When he gets to the bottom, he's surprised to find that he's the first person to be there. No surprise, considering everyone would probably still be asleep this early.

He looks around and knocks on doors frantically, panting and shaking.

"Hello-! Hello, somebody! Guys- Guys, a body, there's a body! Get the fuck up!" He yelps.

Slowly, people began to trickle out into the hallways. Cooper could hear Ted complaining about being woken up. The energy soon changes however as people become alert of the body.

"C-Coop? What's going on?"

Cooper turns around and breathes a sigh of relief when he sees Travis, rubbing the sleep from his eyes.

“Travis, thank god. There’s- Someone-”

“Connor..?”

Cooper turns around to see Schlatt kneeling at the body.

Indeed, the body was Connor. A large pair of scissors were jammed into his stomach, and his hands were covered in blood. He was propped up against his own door, and it looks like he had slid down against the door. It didn’t look like he fought back either

“C-Connor…” Schlatt breathes.

“Schlatt, it- it’ll be okay. We’ll find who did this.” Ted goes to comfort the businessman.

“...This- This damn game took everything from me.” His voice is barely a whisper at this point.

Everyone remains silent for a good minute, circled around Schlatt as he stares off into Connor’s dim eyes.

“This- This stupid /fucking/ game! It- It took Ty, it took Wilbur, and it fucking took Connor! I’ll kill the bastard who did this myself, you hear me-?!”

“Schlatt…” Angel starts, resting a hand on his shoulder.

“No! Don’t fucking touch me-!! I’m going back to bed, this’ll all be one convoluted nightmare. I’m done!”

Schlatt stands up abruptly and stomps off to his room, swinging his door shut.

The group remains in silence for a little longer.

“...So. Do we split up and investigate now, or what?” Techno asks.

Angel nods, and the pair split off.

“Does anyone have any alibis?” Poke asks, prodding Connor’s body.

“Yeah, we were all asleep dipshit.” Sneeg scoffs.

“I mean… except Cooper.” Ted mumbles.

Poke and Sneeg immediately shoot a glance at Cooper.

Poke continues prodding at the body, and when attempting to move it aside to check under the body, Connor's fist unfurls. In his hand is a clump of blonde hair, yanked out in some kind of struggle.

"What…" Poke picks up the hairball and tosses it at Sneeg, who jumps back.

"Gross-! Is that hair? It's…" He stares at it, and spares a glance at Cooper.

Cooper, however, doesn't notice. Instead, he grips the scissors in Connor's gut and tugs, slipping the blades out. Surprisingly, the scissors are as big as his forearm.

"Where would someone get scissors this big..?" He mutters, wiping blood from the scissors on his jeans. Ted looks at him in disgust.

"I-It could be from the garden room upstairs…" Travis murmurs.

Cooper nods. He puts the scissors down next to the body and stands up. He's still getting looks from Poke and Sneeg as Techno and Angel come back empty handed.

"We… Found nothing, it seems. No clues, no nothing. This one seems very spur of the moment." Angel notes, and Techno nods.

The intercom crackles.

"Ohohoho! Rise and shine, folks! Trial time! Report to the main hall!" Gure-ga laughs.

Cooper sighs, and walks ahead of the group. He can hear Travis from behind him, but continues forward.

"Coop! Cooper, are you alright? D-Don't worry about what was in Connor's hand, I'm sure it was just planted evidence! You- You do have an alibi, right?" Travis smiles.

"Uh… Well, I- I was out of my room. In the bathroom. I walk back, there's a body." He lies.

Travis' smile falters, but he nods.

"I believe you, Coop."

Soon enough, the survivors arrive at the trial podiums, and Cooper looks behind to see that Schlatt had lagged behind. When he finally arrived at his podium, Gure-ga bounces about and sits on its couch.

Late, but still arriving, comes Ryan. Well, not entirely Ryan. A few Gure-ga robots stack on top of each other, and the topmost one holds up a screen. There, Ryan's displayed sitting in the infirmary.

"H-Hey. Sorry I wasn't there to help." He sighs.

"Don't stress yourself." Ted gives a weary smile.

"Alright. Let's do this shit, again." Cooper mutters, takes a deep breath, and stands up straight.

PART 5: TRIAL AND EXECUTION

»»————- ☠ -————««

TED: So… Obviously, I feel like we should evaluate here.

ANGEL: Alrighty. The blood was still wet, so that places the crime at around… 2 AM?

COOPER: Actually, it was around 2:30 AM when I saw the body.

TECHNO: And how exactly do you know that..?

COOPER: Uh- I- Well-

TRAVIS: There's a clock in the bathroom.

SNEEG: ...Fair enough.

ANGEL: What's odd to me is that Connor's hands were covered in blood.

ANGEL: It could have been a suicide, you know.

RYAN: You're right…

TECHNO: Based on the angle, and the way the blood splattered… It would be likely.

POKE: That doesn't explain the blonde hair, though.

ANGEL: Hm…

TED: It could be planted evidence. After all, it probably was a suicide based on what everyone else is saying.

SNEEG: How do you think it was a suicide, dumbass?

TED: I'm just setting up a point, asshole. I think that, because Connor and Schlatt are these shady businessmen and stuff, Connor committed suicide and is framing one of us to kill everyone but Schlatt.

SCHLATT: ...

POKE: And I'm supposed to believe this because..?

TED: …

TED: I don't knoooow.

POKE: You're hopeless.

SNEEG: ...Yeah, that got us nowhere.

ANGEL: How about we just go over alibis?

TECHNO: Good idea.

POKE: I'm sure I can speak for everyone when I say that we were all asleep.

POKE: Save for Cooper, I suppose.

SNEEG: Did anyone hear a door open and close?

ANGEL: I don't think so…

TECHNO: The killer might have been staking out.

RYAN: What?

TECHNO: Staking out. They must have set up camp somewhere, watching the dorm rooms for their target. Then, they struck.

ANGEL: We didn't find any evidence of a stakeout though, so…

POKE: It might've been a spur of the moment thing.

POKE: The killer sees Connor, corners him at his door and stabs him. Then, they place evidence…

POKE: ...And go to the bathroom to wash their hands and clothes of blood.

[NONSTOP DEBATE; BEGIN.]

TRAVIS: Are you saying Cooper did it-?

POKE: I'm not saying anything. All I'm implying us that the evidence and alibis match up.

TED: Cooper couldn't have done it!

RYAN: It's very likely he did, though.

SNEEG: In typical Cooper fashion, he was probably quiet and smart about it.

SNEEG: Which is why you don't see any water on his clothes or hands. He murdered Connor, went into the bathroom with a clean pair of clothes, washed himself off and waited until the body discovery announcement.

TECHNO: Oh yeah, didn't that announcement sound weird? It was like a legitimate robot saying it instead of Gure-ga.

[BREAK!]

COOPER: I didn't open my door, though… You would have heard my door open and shut.

SNEEG: You put a pair of clothes in the bathroom beforehand.

COOPER: N-No…

POKE: Yes, Cooper. You plotted this, and made it seem like it was a spontaneous decision to pin it on the more careless of us. Where's the spare set of clothes, huh?

COOPER: …

TECHNO: You know… He does make a convincing argument.

TED: …

COOPER: T-Ted?

TED: I'm sorry, man. I- I don't want to believe them, but it seems like the right choice…

COOPER: …O-Okay. I wasn't really in the bathroom.

POKE: Oh?

ANGEL: That makes you more suspicious, you know.

COOPER: I know, but it wasn't my alibi. Travis covered for me when I started stammering. I was really in the computer lab. I- I saw a picture of Connor's body, then the announcement played…

COOPER: I came downstairs and his body was right there. I was the first one up because I went to the computer lab to see if I could get more information on the mastermind.

COOPER: I'm sorry. That makes me sound more guilty.

SNEEG: It really does.

POKE: I think we've all made out decisions?

TED: Y-Yeah, let's-

TRAVIS: WAIT!

COOPER: Travis..?

TRAVIS: …

TRAVIS: …..

SCHLATT: Spit it out, Travis.

SCHLATT: After all,

SCHLATT: You know what you did.

COOPER: What..?

SCHLATT: Heh.

SCHLATT: You all thought I was /that/ upset about Connor?

SCHLATT: He was just getting in my way. I had to show I was number one somehow.

SCHLATT: Sooo, I managed to convince this little monkey that Connor was the mastermind.

TRAVIS: ...H-He wasn't-?

TRAVIS: You l-lied to me? I- I thought- I thought that- that he was the mastermind-

TRAVIS: You tricked me…

SCHLATT: I had to. He was in my way, and what better way to dispose of dead weight then to not get my hands dirty?

COOPER: T-Travis..?

TRAVIS: ...I- I thought I d-did something good, Coop.

TRAVIS: This- This didn't end the game, did it.

SCHLATT: No it didn't, you ape.

SCHLATT: You're dying for my gain. Isn't that funny? Your skull's so thick, but you actually listened to me. Ha!

TED: You- You're bluffing, Travis would never do this!

SCHLATT: Oh, but he would. Last night, he and I made a deal. I told him Connor was forcing me to work for him. I cried and everything. He felt so bad, Cooper, you should have seen his face, he was crying and everything-

COOPER: You BASTARD!

SCHLATT: I told him that to end the game, Travis had to kill the mastermind. So, he did just that. I got the hair from Charlie's corpse. Did you know that poor bastard is still in the freezer?

COOPER: You're sick-!! You're sick!

SCHLATT: But I'm not getting punished. I'm a special case, unlike poor Ryan.

RYAN: Don't compare me to you! I- I hurt the kid, but at least I didn't pull some strings to get what I wanted!

SCHLATT: I didn't lay a hand on the victim, unlike you. Who was the one that slashed his arms? Who wrestled him to the ground? Who plotted the whole thing?

RYAN: …

SCHLATT: I saw everything, Ryan. You're lucky the infirmary has a lock.

SCHLATT: Anyways, to the point.

SCHLATT: Traaaavis, poor Travis. He's dying for no reason! And he thought he was so noble!

TRAVIS: …

SCHLATT: Cast your votes, you sorry sons of bitches. Look at what I can do to all of you. I'm at the top of the totem pole here. Don't you fucking forget it.

»»————- ☠ ————-««

The votes came in slowly at Schlatt's command, the businessman standing tall at his podium.

Cooper could hardly breathe. Travis? Out of everyone, the one connection he has to the outside world, the boy he's been with since the beginning…

A man with blood on his hands.

His vision swims even as he casts his vote.

The slot machine slowly ticks to Travis' face, and the boy just hugs himself tight, sniffling.

Ted's staring daggers into Schlatt as the taller man circles Travis like a shark, grinning eerily.

"What a shame, Travis. You almost got out of here alive. But no, you had to step in and save Cooper. I thought you were smarter than that." He cackles.

Travis says nothing, but his cloudy eyes look at Cooper, who was staring off and shaking, pale with dismay.

Travis makes a weak attempt at shoving Schlatt away, and slowly approaches Cooper. His lip quivers, and he sniffs once before collapsing into Cooper's arms. The blonde wraps his arms tightly around the other, shaking.

"C-Cooper. Cooper, I'm so so-sorry, I'm sorry, pl-please- please don't me angry at me." He mumbles between heavy sobs.

"Trav-Travis, Trav, you- you stupid monkey, you s-stupid cro magnon, don't leave me like this." He heaves.

Travis says nothing, but grabs tight onto Cooper and bawls into his hoodie.

"Promise- Promise me you aren't gonna cry when I gotta go, okay Coop..?" Travis asks shakily.

Cooper nods into Travis' shoulder.

Travis blinks a few times and lets go, stepping back. He jumps when a chain shoots out and grabs at his ankle, the cuff clamping down.

Travis looks down at the chain, then back at Cooper. The chain tugs, and Travis trips. It pulls back, and Travis is yanked back into an opening in the wall.

Without further judgement, Cooper runs in after him despite the protests of the rest of his peers.

»»————- ☠ ————-««

Both Cooper and Travis find themselves in a faux jungle-like setting. Travis was already dragged further into the bush, and by the time Cooper got out to the other side, Travis was already out of his sight.

"Travis! Travis?!" Cooper hollers, and rushes further into the jungle.

Travis lands in the middle of the jungle setting, the dirt and mulch scratching his knees as he shakily gets up. He looks around, and can faintly hear Cooper from the entrance. He must be farther away. Before getting the chance to move, Travis can spot movement in the bushes.

A small robotic monkey hops out of the underbrush.

Cooper continues to rush into the plantscape, scratched by branches and sharp leaves.

“Travis! Travis, can you hear me?! Travis!”

Travis waves at the monkey. The robot growls and bares its teeth, hissing and jumping towards Travis. It stops at his ankles, and opens its mouth. A deafening screech sounds, and Travis covers his ears. He can spot more monkeys flooding into the dirt clearing.

Cooper can hear the screech as it bounces off the trees and walls. He whips his head around and trudges forward to where he thinks the sound came from.

Robotic monkeys clocking in at the hundreds soon enter the clearing, some climbing on top of each other, some falling from the trees. Either way, Travis was surrounded. He whimpers, and the monkey at his feet makes the first move, sinking its teeth into Travis’ leg. He yelps in pain, and the monkeys make their move.

Cooper hears Travis yell and breaks into a full blown sprint. He can start to hear monkeys howling and screeching.

Monkeys begin to scratch at Travis, clawing at his back and biting hard into his arms. He shakes a few off, but for every few he gets off of him, ten more appear to maim him. He sobs as one bites into his side.

“C-Cooper-!!”

Cooper couldn’t be running faster. The noises are closer.

Travis can spot someone barreling towards him.

Cooper finally makes it into the clearing, and punts a monkey out of his way. It goes flying. Cooper makes eye contact with Travis and he smiles, before picking up and throwing monkeys. Travis attempts to do the same, but he trips and falls into a particularly loud group of robots.

A monkey hops up Cooper’s back and drags its claws across his face. Cooper screams and shakes the monkey off.

Blood drips into Travis’ eyes as monkeys start tearing the skin from his forehead. He shrieks in pain. He can barely feel his own tears on his face.

Cooper stomps through the monkeys, and Travis' desperate cries begin to slowly die down. The monkeys begin to thin out as Cooper approaches, and when the blonde gets to Travis, he quickly hoists the boy up.

"Tr-Travis, Trav, c-c'mon, we need to go-! You're okay, let's go, let's-"

"C-Cooper."

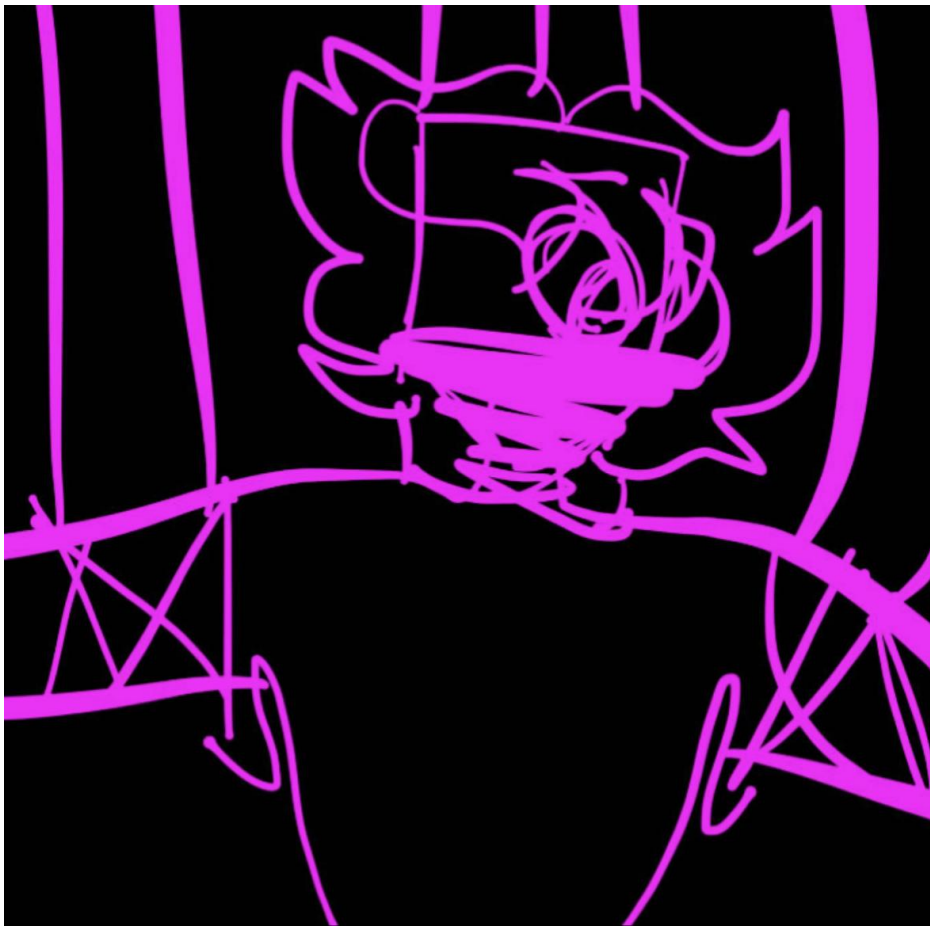
Travis gurgles with his dying breath as blood fills his mouth. With shaky legs, he slips out of Cooper's grip and onto his knees. Looking up at Cooper with tears and blood in his eyes, he smiles.

A monkey had clamped down onto his neck, ripping out his jugular.

Travis collapses to the ground, twitching and gurgling, before dying with a small smile on his face.

The monkeys completely dissipate as Cooper begins to wail.

CHAPTER 005: DARKER AND DARKER



»»————- ☠ -————««

From what Cooper can remember from that night, he had collapsed to his knees, sobbing.

He was clutching Travis' bloodied body as the warmth drained out of him, and…

He remembers running out of the clearing, running out back into the tunnel Travis was dragged through.

He remembers running back into the trial room to everybody's surprise, and Schlatt grappled by the collar by Ted.

Ted had dropped Schlatt immediately, and the businessman had looked at Cooper smugly.

Cooper saw red.

The next thing he could remember was red, that is.

Schlatt's blood staining his hands. He had punched hard into Schlatt's nose. He could hear a satisfying crunch as his fist made an impact.

He looks down at his hands now, laying in the infirmary bed. Blood was still staining his fingers.

He remembers whaling on Schlatt. He made an attempt to fight. He dug his fingers into Cooper's open wounds from the robot monkeys, the long scratches stretching from the side of his chin to his cheekbone. One long cut dug in too deep, a mark spanning from the middle of his chin, stretching up into his lips, splitting them, and dragging upwards to about under his nostrils. Every time he breathed, warm air would sigh onto it and every time Cooper would recoil in slight pain.

His hand ghosts the side of his face. It was stitched up, luckily.

He remembers feeling someone pull him back. He fell backwards, and he distinctly remembers nobody being there to pull him back. He felt the tug on his shirt, he swore.

He remembers seeing Sneeg pull Schlatt towards him, and he doesn't remember what but Sneeg was screaming, he was screaming and Cooper can't remember what he said but he remembers how it made his ears hurt and how his head hurt and how-

He doesn't remember anything after that.

He blinks himself out of his head, and looks around. He jumps when he makes eye contact with Ryan. He looks at that blinded eye and shudders. Ryan looks back at the book in his hands, looks back at Cooper, and shuts the book with a look of concern. Cooper just stares off into Ryan. Ryan's face is still bruised and the blue streak in his hair is faded. Cooper looks down at his hands. There's still blood there.

Ryan's hands don't hand blood on them, he notes. Ryan got the blood off. He forgave himself and the blood washed off. He reeks of blood. He can taste it. Cooper feels sick.

"Cooper..? Cooper, I'm sorry…" He starts.

"Don't- Don't, Ryan. I don't want to talk about him right now." He stares off, a mix of rage and dismay building in his gut.

"...I know. It's best to just talk things through, though. I- I miss Altrive as much as you miss Travis, but it's always best to keep them in mind."

The two sit in silence for a while. Cooper stares into Ryan's blind eye.

"...You've been here a lot more recently." Ryan remarks, and Cooper just nods.

“I know,” Cooper sighs, “I just can’t stand this place anymore.”

“Neither can I, but that’s no excuse to break down now, Cooper.”

“H-Huh?” Cooper does a double take.

“You’re probably one of the strongest people here, dude. You can’t give up now! You can’t let whatever Schlatt’s playing at get the better of you. If it gets to you, it gets to all of us. We all got your back, Cooper! We all do!” Ryan shoots up in his bed, grinning madly with his functioning eye glittering intensely.

Cooper takes this into consideration. Hypothetically, he could OD on whatever sort of medication is in here. Up the morphine drip and never wake up again.

Hypothetically.

If Ryan is right, if everyone really does believe in him like that…

“Do you think… Do you think that Travis believes in me?” He asks softly, and Ryan nods.

“Of course he does, Cooper. He was rooting for you until the very end. I may be blind in one eye, but I’m pretty damn observant. He believed in you from the very beginning.” He smiles.

Cooper can’t help but agree in a way.

He slides back into the bed, and Ryan goes back to the book he placed in his lap.

Cooper can still smell the blood.

“...Ryan? How did it feel?” Cooper stares, voice mumbled.

Ryan keeps reading, eyes down.

“What do you mean?”

“How did it feel to be that close to death?” His voice comes out too quiet.

“Oh… It felt awful. I- I hurt someone. I don’t ever want to do that again. I- I caused two deaths. I felt so guilty, Cooper. I was so close to dying. Falling through that… I- I can still feel the breaking of my- of my bones. I don’t- I just don’t want to get hurt again. I don’t want anyone to get hurt anymore.” His voice shakes.

Cooper looks down at his own hands. They reek of blood. He can feel the blood in his pores, in every crack, every bruise on his knuckles, he's unclean, it hurts, it hurts-

Cooper shoots his gaze to Ryan, who's now looking at him with small tears in his eyes.

"Cooper? Do you understand..? I regret it every single day of my life. I don't want anyone hurting anymore. We- We need to stop this game." He presses his lips together in a firm smile.

Cooper can't hear him. He's unclean, there's blood everywhere, it's hot and it burns and it's all in Ryan- Ryan, a murderer, Ryan, a man that escaped death.

Something pushes Cooper out of his bed, scratching wildly at the stitched cut under his nose. The blood was under his fingers now. Unclean. Filthy.

Ryan looks at him in confusion. He says something. Cooper can't hear him. There's blood rushing in his ears.

Something itches in him to stop what he was going to do, but a stronger force pushed his hands towards Ryan. Something pushed his hands around Ryan's neck. He couldn't even react.

Was this despair? Pure, unfiltered delusion? He couldn't tell anymore.

All he could tell was that Ryan was struggling to breathe now.

PART 2: DANIEL 2:22

»»————- ☠ ————-««

"Cooper, what in the actual FUCK are you doing-?!"

Cooper can hear two people rush up from behind him as Ryan struggles against his grip. The one eyed man was quickly giving up, however.

He can feel himself getting ripping back from Ryan, and the man in bed scuttles back, heaving air into his lungs. Cooper is toppled back onto the bed and pinned down. Ted's staring into his face with fury in his eyes. Techno's behind him, checking on Ryan. Ryan's face was drained of color, and his neck already showed signs of bruising.

"What the fuck! What the fuck is wrong with you, Cooper? You were trying to fucking murder him, weren't you? Weren't you?!" The taller man snarls.

Cooper doesn't say anything. His breathing is ragged and shaky, and he brings his hands up slowly to his own face.

"Cooper! You- You fucking- I can't fucking believe you! Ryan didn't do anything wrong! Are you fuckin' nuts?!"

"Ted…" Techno starts.

"No! No, dude. This is unacceptable! Cooper, you out of all people?! Travis just fuckin' died, we don't need you dying right now, asshole!"

"Ted!" Techno shouts.

The commentator turns back to face the hitman, who jabs a thumb back at Cooper. It's only then that both Cooper and Ted realize that he's crying. Cooper draws a hand back from his face. It's coated in blood from the wound he scratched open, and wet with tears.

Cooper just makes a noise of discontent and sniffles.

"...I- I don't know what I was doing. I lost it for a second." He mumbles.

Ted looks at Ryan, who clasps at his throat with one hand and waves Ted off with the other. He looks back at Cooper and sighs.

"This is about... Travis, isn't it, dude." He mumbles.

Cooper makes no noise, but nods.

"Cooper, you can't do things like this. Your friend died, we've all lost someone here at some point. You- You need to cope with this shit in a healthy manner. Strangling people isn't the fucking answer, dude." Ted laments bitterly.

"Tell that to Schlatt. His intern died, and all the sudden he's gone batshit evil bitch mode." Cooper scoffs.

"Don't compare yourself to him. He was shady from the beginning. You're only digging yourself deeper the more unhinged you're getting. I- I mean look at you! You look like you haven't slept in days." Ted grimaces.

Cooper just flexes his hands, staring down at them.

"Get a hold of yourself, dude. I- I was coming over to have Techno watch you and Ryan, considering the fact that it looks like people are getting more- uh- emotional. Like, just last night,

Sneeg had yelled so hard at Schlatt he could barely stand afterwards. Everyone here has to potential to be dangerous.” He sighs.

“So… You put a hitman in charge of us?” Cooper deadpans.

“Wh- Well, uh, he doesn’t have any weapons on him. Those are off somewhere else, right Techno?” Ted nudges the hitman, who nods.

Cooper looked Techno up and down, and he looked clean. No gear on him, just his cape, a jacket and a bulky pair of army pants. No pouches, no belt, no bags, no nothing.

“Ted, he- he doesn’t need to watch me. I’m fine, I can function. It’s Ryan that needs help, he can barely stand!” Cooper argues.

“Listen, Cooper, Ryan may be fuckin’ crippled, but you’re off the fucking goop. Until you calm down from being batshit crazy, you’re gonna hang in here. No exploring, no looking for answers, no nothing. You’re staying right here.” Ted explains, and Cooper rolls his eyes.

“Sure, dad.” He mumbles.

Ted opens his mouth to argue, but he stops, pressing his lips together as his cheeks flush slightly.

“Anyways. I’m out, I’ll have Poke and Angel bring things. Techno, don’t- uh- leave the room, alright? Unless absolutely necessary, yeah?” Ted questions, stepping towards the door.

Techno nods. Ted leaves the room.

Cooper tosses his head back and groans in dismay and boredom.

He looks back at Ryan, still idly rubbing his neck.

“...Ryan? I- I’m sorry for, uh, doing you like that. I wasn’t thinking clearly.” He mumbles.

“I-It’s fine, Cooper. I understand why you would be that emotionally distraught. And- And I know you won’t do it again. Right?” He smiles weakly.

“Yeah… I- I don’t want to do that again.” He nods.

PART 3

»»————- ☠ ————-««

Cooper blinks himself awake to find himself in a dark, dark room. The dark swims in his eyes, and the infirmary feels colder than normal.

He sits up, and immediately finds that Ryan is gone.

His eyes widen and the cold bites at his eyes. He looks around and focuses in on what he can. The room smells like bitter earth and rust. It smells… rotten, almost. Ryan's bed has a faint sheen to it in the dark. Blood. It's blood.

"Not this shit again." Cooper mumbles. His breath comes out cold.

His bare feet hit the floor, and the floor itself is wet and cold. The cold shoots up his legs and he hisses, recoiling back into the bed. The same rust smell. Cold, cold blood. He steps back down and, despite his judgement, stands up. He feels around the room for a light switch, feeling the blank walls. He reaches the doorframe and, next to it, a lightswitch. He flicks it on and only one light flickers on, though it gives him a clear enough view to see the blood staining the floor. He holds back a gag.

"Dream, i-it's a dream." He assures himself.

The door behind him creaks open to a dark, dark corridor. He can hear a heart thrumming, one that isn't his own as he steps into the hallway. He traces a finger along the wall as he moves slowly down the hallway. The walls flex and flinch at his touch.

He stops walking and turns his attention to the wall. It pulses and breathes as he jams a finger into it. It's wet. It's soft and wet. Cooper pushes harder. The skin breaks, and something warm from the wall spurts onto him. He steps back, and the walls shudder. He goes back and digs harder into the flesh. It's warm, but the deeper he goes the colder it feels. Cooper pulls at a hunk of muscle, and the meat bleeds in his hands.

He drops the meat to the floor. His hands shine with blood and phlegm. He starts to shake and moves on. The walls continue breathing. He stumbles forward, the end of the hallway leading to a small door. He fumbles for the handle, twisting it open. He swears he can feel someone watching him as he leaves.

He sighs in relief and shuts the door behind him. The room he finds himself in is cold. The blood on his hands grow cold, and he flexes his hands to keep them from growing too cold. The room is all black, save for an unknown light source reflecting the blood on the floor. That isn't what catches his eye, though.

What catches his eye is the man from the tapes, Joko, sprawled out on the floor. He's not breathing.

He’s not breathing.

Cooper rushes forward, panic in his mind as he grabs for Joko. He kneels at his side and presses hard against his chest, attempting CPR as the lifeless man before him lays there.

After the tenth push, a rush of thick, dark yellow fluid rises up and out of his throat and nose. It smells like rot, and Cooper reels back and gags hard.

Cooper gives one last push, and the yellow fluid flows harder out of the man’s orifices. His mouth hangs open and the last of the rot gurgles out of his throat and mixes with the blood on the floor. A sickly brown.

Joko seizes up on the floor and his eyes shoot open, bloodshot, red rimmed eyes piercing into Cooper. His mouth sputters and he coughs up more rot. What puts Cooper off though, is the piercing blue eyes.

And from what he remembers, Joko didn’t have blue eyes in the tapes.

Joko’s shaky arm raises up and points off towards the left. Cooper looks up, and Joko’s hands go limp.

There, in the corner, is himself. Back turned and talking to someone. Their speech was muffled, but Cooper could hear his own dialogue clear as day.

“You really think so…”

“This’ll be fun. I’m a genius, aren’t I!”

“What… What do you mean?”

“You can’t- You can’t do that to me! You can’t!”

“You can’t, stop it, stop it-!!”

His vision goes spotty when his own shrieks fade off. He looks back at Joko. The man’s sat up straight and staring right into Cooper. Those blue eyes… They aren’t his.

“‘Til death do us part.” Joko gurgles.

His vision fades out.

»»————- ☠ ————-««

Cooper wakes up with a start, writhing in the infirmary bed. He looks around and heaves, coughing. He shoots up in his bed and clenches his teeth together. A dream. Just a dream. That's all it was.

Ryan looks at him with concern, sat up with a plate of pancakes in his lap.

"Cooper? You alright? You're sweating like a madman." He rasps, voice still hurt from Cooper's outburst.

Cooper says nothing but swallows his own tongue, nodding.

"I'm fine."

The room was normal. No blood, no rotting liquid, no living, breathing walls of flesh and muscle.

Ryan gives him a concerned smile and goes back to his pancakes.

Cooper leans back against the headrest and stares off, still catching his breath. He scans the wall and, strangely, notices something missing.

"Ryan? You know where Techno went?" Cooper asks.

"Oh, he's in the cafeteria. He wanted coffee. I asked for tea for me and you, so hopefully he doesn't spill anything on the way back." Ryan smiles.

"Pheh, he's a hitman, not a maid. Besides, I'm not a tea person." Cooper shrugs.

"Well then, go and correct him. I'm not the one that can walk here." He chuckles. Cooper gives him a look.

Nonetheless, Cooper slides out of bed and out of the infirmary, leaving Ryan with his pancakes. Down the flights of steps to the first floor, he avoids eye contact with Schlatt, who was exiting the furnace room, and walks into the cafeteria.

He furrows his brow in confusion at the lump of bed sheets crumpled on a nearby table. He approaches and pulls back the sheet, and stumbles back in shock.

Someone did it. Again.

"A body has been discovered!"

PART 4: BODY DISCOVERY

»»————- ☠ ————-««

Cooper stumbles back, the bed sheets tangling in between his ankles and tripling the blonde to the floor. The announcement goes off and Schlatt is the first one in, almost skidding on the bed sheets. He looks over at Cooper and gives a scoff, before looking at the body and reeling in surprise.

“...Jesus, I didn’t think anyone would be able to catch this dude.”

Cooper sits up and wiggles out of the sheets, looking at the body. He gives a sour look to Schlatt, but can’t help but agree with the businessman.

After all, taking down a hitman is a hard thing to do.

Because here Techno is, the hitman slouched over on top of the table. A belt was left looped tightly around his neck, his face blue and pale. On his back, a large dusty footprint. Clutched in his hand, an empty coffee cup. A small plate was shattered on the ground, and the coffee was spilled out onto the table and floor. A clean knife hung loosely in his other hand.

Cooper feels sick.

“Oh- Oh fuck…” He murmurs, and Schlatt just scoffs.

“He was bound to die. The strongest always fall. They can never keep themselves up forever, you know. Maybe he let himself die.” Schlatt remarks.

Cooper has to bite back an insult. Civil, be civil.

“No, it looks like a surprise attack. The killer came from behind to strangle Techno, he attempted to fight back by getting his knife, but…”

“The killer was strong enough to actually finish him.” Schlatt finishes.

Shortly after Schlatt stops, Poke and Sneeg rush in, followed by Angel and Ted.

“H-Holy shit!” Poke yelps.

“Who in the hell managed to take down a fucking hitman? Isn’t that dude trained in combat?” Ted asks.

“Yeah, so how any one of us managed to catch him off guard is fuckin’ beyond me.” Sneeg rolls his eyes.

Cooper steps towards Techno’s body and lifts his head up. He then pushes the body onto its back to examine further.

There, on the belt around his neck. Scratch marks and fresh blood. Blood from small scratches on Techno’s neck. Blood that was still wet.

“...Techno’s murder probably happened a few minutes before I got down here.” Cooper says.

“Why? Whatcha got?” Angel asks.

“Fresh blood on Techno’s neck. My bet is that he scratched at the belt and ended up scratching at his neck, too. If the blood is still wet, then… This was a recent killing.” Cooper explains.

“H-Holy shit, you think so?” Ted moves closer to the body.

“I’m sure. Ryan even said that, before I woke up this morning, he left to get drinks for himself and me and Ryan.” Cooper adds.

“You know… I do think I saw someone walk into the cafeteria. They were wearing a white bed sheet over themselves, too. I thought to myself, hey, what a fucking idiot, but now that I realize it’s here… I coulda stopped this asshole.” Poke hums.

“What exactly were you doing?” Angel asks, leaning in.

“I was doing what Techno wanted to do. I was coming down here for coffee.” He shrugs.

“Do you-”

“Alright! Investigation time is over, everyone! To the main hall, pronto!” Screeches the moth.

Cooper nearly jumps. That was quicker than usual.

“Well… I guess the only reliable clue we have is Poke’s account.” Ted mumbles besides Cooper.

The small group heads to the main hall quickly, and as they stand at their respective podiums again, Travis’ portrait stares into Cooper. He reaches for the portrait, but Ted stops him, a hand on his shoulder.

“We miss him too, man, but this isn’t the time.” Ted sighs.

He has a point. Grieving can wait, and Travis would want him to solve this case. Travis would want him to end this game once and for all.

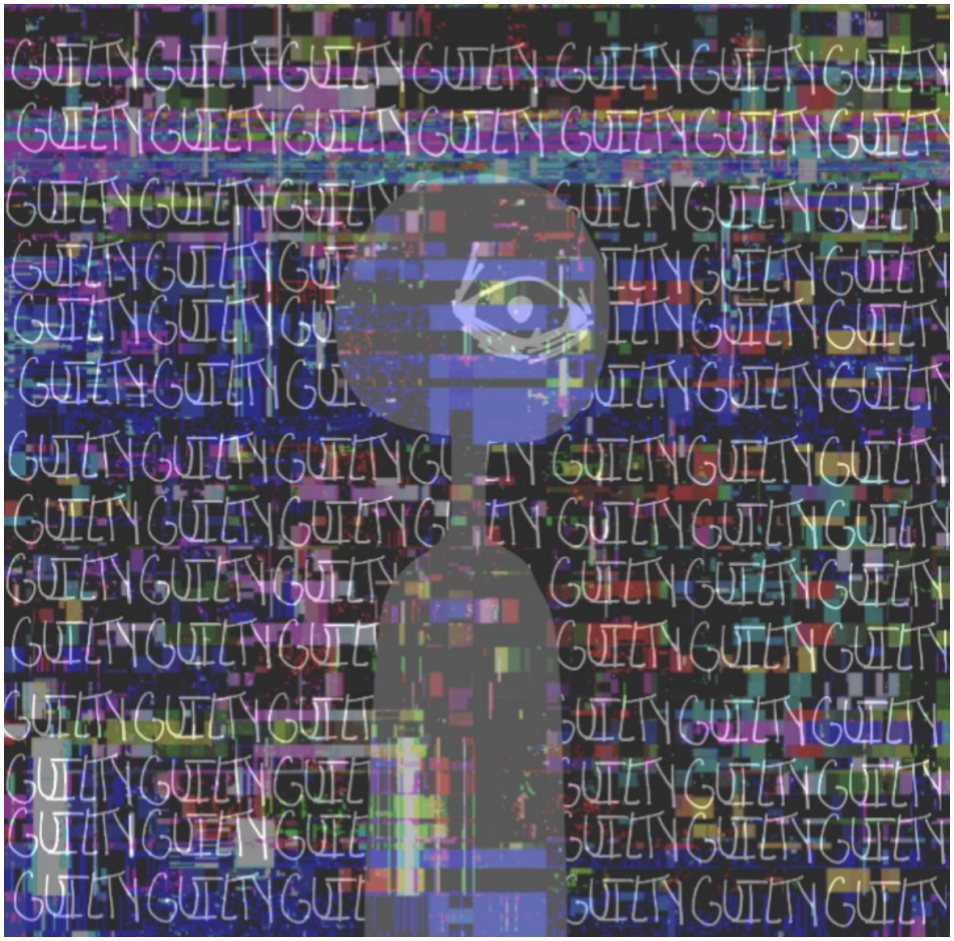
Or… Maybe he's just putting words in his gone mouth.

He's probably still in that jungle setting.

"..."

"Alright. Here we go. Again."

PART 5: TRIAL AND EXECUTION



»»————- ☠ ————-««

TED: So, how about we go over everything that happened?

ANGEL: Oh, taking the lead I see? How sweet.

TED: I… Cannot tell if you're being serious.

ANGEL: Nevermind.

SNEEG: Alright, anyways…

SNEEG: So, going over everything?

SNEEG: Techno tells Ryan that he's getting coffee, at the same time, Poke goes to get coffee…

TED: Then, Poke sees someone follow Techno in. Techno's enjoying a cup of coffee himself, before the murderer sneaks up behind him and starts strangling with their own belt.

SCHLATT: So what was the point of that knife?

COOPER: He probably took that out to attempt to fight back. He was probably too weak to take a swipe at the culprit. The knife was clean.

TED: That belt was pretty tight…

COOPER: So we're looking for someone physically able to overpower him.

[NONSTOP DEBATE; BEGIN!]

SNEEG: So, who do you think is able to kill Techno?

POKE: Anybody if you sneak hard enough…

ANGEL: By the way, Poke, do you remember what the person looked like?

POKE: Oh, yeah. Taller than me, uh, that's really all I got.

TED: Okay, that really only eliminates you, Cooper, and Angel.

SNEEG: Are you saying you could be the murderer?

TED: No, but I'm not going to outright eliminate myself if I'm the one making the notice. I'm tall as hell, dude.

SNEEG: Alright, but that just sounds suspicious.

SCHLATT: Something isn't lining up…

SCHLATT: Poke, what did you do after you saw the person go into the cafeteria?

POKE: Well, I-

POKE: …

POKE: I followed them in.

[BREAK!]

COOPER: You followed them in?

COOPER: The bed sheet was covering Techno, and if my suspicions are right, the murderer didn't have another sheet with them.

TED: So you must have seen their face, right?

POKE: No… I didn't.

POKE: I didn't want to tell you this, because I feel like I would be considered suspicious, but I found one of my masks and bandanas at the crime scene.

SNEEG: Where did you see those?

POKE: When we were walking out… They were crammed in the corner of the cafeteria behind a trashcan.

COOPER: So… You think that this was used to frame you?

POKE: No.

POKE: The killer used my shit to hide their face, their hair, everything. I couldn't see anything except their eyes.

COOPER: Weird…

POKE: If you even think about suspecting me, I have an alibi. I was showering before I came down here.

SNEEG: I can vouch for him. I kinda accidentally walked in on him. This bastard squealed like a little girl-

POKE: You shut your mouth!

ANGEL: So… That left your room empty.

POKE: Yeah. Nobody really comes into my room except Sneeg to play video games from his talent room.

ANGEL: …

ANGEL: So, Sneeg, you know your way around Poke's room?

SNEEG: Yes? Is that an issue?

ANGEL: No, not really…

ANGEL: It's just that it would make sense to know where Poke keeps his things, right?

SNEEG: I mean I guess, but that doesn't prove anything if you're trying to convict me. You're gonna have to try a little harder than that.

RYAN: W-Well, do you at least have a solid alibi?

SNEEG: Yeah. I woke up and needed to take a piss. Lo and behold, the bathroom's occupied, because Poke's bitchass decided to shower.

POKE: It's not my fault I practice basic hygiene! You're probably caked in your own sweat.

SCHLATT: You bicker like children.

ANGEL: Alright, whatever. Poke, did you notice anything out of the ordinary when you went back to your room?

POKE: When I went back to my room? Uh, no, but… The closet door was open.

ANGEL: So someone did sneak into your room.

ANGEL: And the only person that would know that you were out of your room…

ANGEL: Was Sneeg.

SNEEG: What? Fuck off, you have no evidence to back this up.

TED: But I do.

TED: You wanna know what I saw when I opened my door a crack this morning? I spotted you, holding one of Poke's masks.

TED: I didn't think much of it, but… Now with this evidence lining up, it finally clicks.

SNEEG: F-Fuck off! I didn't fucking kill Techno, you asswipe!

POKE: What? Dude, you fuckin' killed someone?

SNEEG: No-!! No. No I didn't.

ANGEL: If you didn't then what were you doing at the time of Techno's death?

SNEEG: I was in my room!

TED: Doing what exactly?

SNEEG: …

COOPER: The gig is up, Sneeg.

SNEEG: ...What, you think I'll just- I'll just go down like that? Huh?!

SNEEG: Go on and vote me! I did it! Fine!

SNEEG: But what do you expect from me, huh? A sob story like Travis or Wilbur? I'm not them! I'm none of them! You aren't getting a single tear outta me, assholes!

SCHLATT: …

SNEEG: Stop smilin', you piece of shit con artist.

SNEEG: He's got you all wrapped around his finger, and you don't even know! No matter how much you despise him, you just can't help but submit under the bastard, can you.

SNEEG: I'm smart. I've put all the puzzle pieces together. I know exactly who this smug dirtbag is working for! He isn't very subtle, is he? This motherfucker's a traitor.

SCHLATT: …

SNEEG: You don't see the danger right in front of your noses! I have no reason for murdering Techno, I just did! I'm doing this to show you all just how fucking powerless you are against him.

SNEEG: If Techno's dead, then who's gonna stop him from fucking you all over for his own gain?

GURE-GA: That's ENOUGH! Vote already to shut this bastard up!

»»————- ☠ ————-««

The votes rolled in quickly, and the slot machine landed on Sneeg.

The PVPer in question just clenched his fists together, icy gaze scanning the rest of the remaining survivors and grimacing. Poke looks devastated and absolutely furious.

"So- So you murdered to prove a point?! To deprive us of safety? You asshole!" He yells.

"There WAS no safety here. People kept dying, and you honestly thought the hitman would save you? You're all ridiculous! Nobody's safe here, and nobody's safe with Schlatt still alive!"

Sneeg bends down and pulls his pant leg up. There, in his sock, is a bulky object. Pulling it out reveals a sheathed switchblade. Sneeg flips the blade around and jabs it towards Schlatt.

"See you in hell, you slimy motherfucker."

With that, Sneeg rushes for Schlatt, knife clutched in hand.

Nobody attempts to stop him, and Schlatt simply stands there, blanched.

Sneeg's rushed right in front of him, and is about to swing the blade down right into Schlatt's shoulder when a shot rings out. Angel shrieks.

Sneeg stops and drops the knife, shaking. A hand flies to his chest, already soaking with rusted red.

He chokes once, twice, and falls to his knees.

"See- you in h-hell." He gurgles, then falls flat on his face in front of Schlatt's feet.

Sneeg had been shot through the heart.

The odd thing is though, Cooper can't locate where it came from. He looks around, and Ted seems to think the same thing.

"Ohohoho! New rule! No murdering at trials!" Gure-ga chuckles.

"W-Where the hell did that come from?" Poke yells.

“Uohahaha! Haaahaha!” The moth cackles.

“...Are we done? Can we go sulk back in our rooms now?” Ted deadpans.

“Ohh, nope! Don’tcha know? You kids got one more murder to solve. Or, rather, five! Hyahaha!” Gure-ga bounces excitedly.

Several more TVs slide out of the walls, all with the Gure-ga face on them.

“You gotta solve who exactly is behind the executions! Who put you here in the first place! Technically, the executions are still murder in the game, so you gotta find who’s running this game and end it!” The moth’s robot body disappears, and the voice instead comes from the speakers.

“Y-You don’t mean-” Cooper wheezes.

“Find the mastermind, bring them to justice, and hold a trial for the executed ones! Ohoho! Who blew up Carson, who drowned Wilbur! Who impaled Altrive! Who mauled Travis! Who shot Sneeg! Gyeheheh!”

“And the key to your answers?”

“Lies in Cooper. Cooper, what have you been keeping from your friends?”

“What do you remember?”

CHAPTER 006: BRUTUS

»»————- ☠ -————««

“What do you remember..? Cooper, what in the hell is going on? What does this guy mean?” Ted yelps, clutching his podium.

“What have you been keeping? You dirty liar! You- You’ve been acting like our friend this whole time, but you’re probably as bad as Schlatt!” Poke yells.

Cooper only stands there, looking down at his hands.

The computer…

The tapes…

The videos and pictures on the computer…

…

“...There’s so much to tell you.” He mumbles.

“Go on, then, maybe I won’t try to stab you like Sneeg.” Poke hisses, gritting his teeth.

“I think there’s… Something deeper. Something way too deep that I still can’t wrap my head around. You guys remember the tapes?” He sighs.

Scattered nods.

“Well… I found that certain tapes are- are different than what others got. Travis just got a spooky video, but… I got footage of my abduction. Me, and Travis, and,” He inhales shakily,

“and Ted, and Carson. We got abducted together after pulling over in a car.”

Ted blanches.

“Why don’t- Why don’t I remember that..?” He whispers.

“They fucked with our heads. The mastermind. They fucked with us hard. What did you remember when waking up?”

“My name, my age, and… my talent. That’s really it.” Angel answers.

“Talents… Angel, you aren’t really a ‘gamer girl’ or some shit, are you?” Cooper points at finger at the girl, and she raises her eyebrows.

“I- Yes. I work with the law.”

“I know about those case files. We were all abducted without a trace. Everyone except Schlatt, who worked with the mastermind to abduct everyone, only to get backstabbed by them.” The businessman in question reels back in surprise.

“T-They what-?! That rat bastard!” He yells, throwing his hands up.

“Slow down- Where’s your proof of this?” Poke squints his eyes.

“There’s a tape in my room-”

“Ohoho, you mean these tapes?” A Gure-ga waddles in with a stack of tapes.

Cooper looks almost surprised.

“Wh- I, uh, yeah. Those.” He nods slowly.

The robot waves around a tape marked ‘SCHLATT’.

Schlatt reaches for the tape, but the robot jerks it away and giggles.

“That exact tape has footage of Schlatt accepting a deal with, presumably, the mastermind.” He says, pointing towards Schlatt.

“So, anything else? Huh? If I don’t remember this, and none of us remember getting kidnapped, then what does this mean?” Ted thinks out loud, massaging his temples.

“...”

“It- It means someone wiped our memories clean. I know this for a fact, because when I was in the computer lab a while back, I- I saw photos of us. Together. Photos, and videos, and so much shit of us being friends outside of this game.” Cooper exhales shakily.

He’s greeted with a stunned silence.

“...Are you serious?” Poke whispers.

“Dead serious. Do… Do any of you know who Joko is?” He asks.

Everyone remains silent.

“Well- I saw him in a dream. I saw him in my tape, too, but- but he’s a real person. He’s real. Nobody else remembers him but me. But… He was the body on the road we stopped to see.”

“And I think this Joko person is behind the whole thing.”

Schlatt just scoffs.

“Where’s your proof? You just love accusing anyone of just running this game. First me, now a person none of us know!” He cackles.

“Shut the hell up.” Poke groans.

“...The tape. He was alive. Schlatt was here, too. He shot the last guy in the car with us, and then I saw Joko talking about someone named Amanda-”

Cooper stops to breath, and he just starts to notice that one by one, Gure-ga robots had flooded the area, lined up at the walls. The lights were dimmer as well, making shady areas where the moths would gather, their eyes glowing a menacing red. Cooper swallows the lump in his throat and continues.

“...He wanted someone named Amanda. Then it cut out. Schlatt said something about extra payment… Needing him one last time... I believe that Joko is being used to operate the game.” He huffs.

The robots slowly start beeping. The lights dim further. Ted looks up in confusion, and the TVs cut to static.

“...I don’t know about you, but- but I might just be right here.” He looks over to Schlatt, who looked fairly terrified.

“Are you telling me that’s the bitch that snaked me?” He yelps.

“He just might be.” Cooper responds.

“Uh… Guys? The- The TVs-” Ryan points upward shakily at one of the TVs.

The TV in question displayed a choppy, glitched out version of a live feed of the remaining survivors.

The video soon switched onto the rest of the TVs, the same glitched out live footage playing.

The lights soon went haywire, flashing wildly in several places. Ryan squints his eyes.

The robots began beeping, whirring, and making various sounds. One starts smoking, and eventually falls over with a loud bang. Schlatt jumps.

Soon enough, the display ended, and the robots shut off. All of the TVs shut off, except for one, which switched to a room almost unfamiliar to Cooper.

Almost…

Fuck. That time in the infirmary with Travis.

That’s the room they discovered.

Someone’s sat in the chair, however, and they spin around with a wide, forced grin.

That brown hair… The deep voice…

“Sorry for the power surge, everyone. Hopefully that was fixed. I wouldn’t know, because this is prerecorded. Anyways… Welcome to the beginning of the end of your lives.”

“I’d like to first congratulate you on making it this far. Truly, according to the script, I didn’t expect Schlatt to survive, but hey, going off book isn’t always a bad thing.”

“Ah well. You’ll have questions for me, I’m sure. You must be dying to see me. After all… ‘Til death do us part, Cooper.”

The man winks, and the TV shuts off.

Cooper can hear walking from behind him, and the group turns to look behind them.

There, at the staircase…

Joko.

PART 2: THE THANATOS DRIVE

»»————- ☠ ————-««

The mastermind himself grins widely, and the survivors stare him down with mixes of anger and fear.

Schlatt goes to say something, but ultimately doesn’t in the presence of his superior.

“Glad to see you.” He states simply, approaching slowly.

“I’m sure you have questions for me. Why are we here? Who the hell are you? Blah, blah, bl-”

“Yeah, I got a question for you!” Poke yells.

Joko turns to him with a smug expression.

“What the hell kind of a name is Gure-ga, you fucking weeb? That’s scuffed as shit!”

The room is silent. Ted has to choke back a laugh.

“...It wasn’t my choice to name the robots. The name just stuck.” He sighs begrudgingly.

“Alright, anyways! I’m thrilled to see you all here. Especially you, Schlatt. You didn’t crack once, I see.” He smiles, approaching an empty podium. He picks up Carson’s portrait and tosses it to the side.

“Don’t talk to me like that! You snaked me!”

“You also betrayed your friends at the very start, didn’t you.” Joko deadpans.

Schlatt quiets down. He looks down at Sneeg’s body and nudges it with his foot. Poke and Angel shoot him a look.

“So quiet… If you have any questions, be sure to bring it up now before we get into the real part.” Joko yawns.

“The… The real part?” Angel asks.

“Yeah, the whole debate thing, life or death, yadda yadda.” Joko rolls his eyes.

The survivors look at each other in confusion. He’s not very organized, is he.

“Alright, whatever. You need to figure out exactly why you’re here, and why you can’t remember anything. You have one hour to do so. Failure to solve this part of the case will result in escape being impossible. You’ll live here for the rest of your days! Isn’t that exciting.” The mastermind cackles.

“The rest of our lives-?! What kinda sick game is this?” Ted calls out.

Joko just wags a finger at the man.

“The one you’ve been playing this whole time! Maybe Cooper’s the answer again, I don’t know.” Joko shrugs.

The survivors turn to look at each other once more.

“So... Why we’re all here?” Ryan asks quietly.

“I don’t remember doing anything wrong!” Ted yelps.

“None of us remember anything, dipshit. That’s why. I say we’re at an unfair advantage. The only person here skilled in emotional torment at this point is Cooper.” Poke jabs a thumb at the blonde.

“Well… If we all got our memories wiped, then there’s gotta be something connecting us all prior to that, right?” Angel looks at Cooper, who just sort of shrugs.

“I- I mean, I think we all knew each other. But how? What brought us together?” Ted stares down at his podium.

That’s when it hits.

Convention hall.

They’re here, or were here originally…

“We all were planning on going to the same convention! There- There was a picture of Poke and Sneeg at a convention hall, and- and it kinda looked similar to this one! I think that, while we all were taken at different times, we all had one common goal. That’s what connected us.” Cooper white knuckles the podium.

Joko claps slowly.

“Well done. The first of many pieces are in place. Now, why exactly do you, out of all people, know that?” Joko asks.

“Because you’re the bitch ass who decided it would be funny to mess with my head!” He hisses.

“Cooper! Calm down. We don’t need a fight right now. What we need is answers.” Angel states.

“If we want answers, why don’t we ask Schlatt, huh?” Poke yells accusingly.

The group turns to look at Schlatt, who had returned to his smug demeanor.

“I can tell you everything I want you to know. So I’ll tell you this. You all had one thing in common prior to this game, and it connects to the convention you all were planning to go to.” He smiles.

“Don’t smile at me, you goddamned-”

“Cooper.”

“Sorry.”

“Right. Anyways. Think for a second. If what I’m thinking is right… Poke is an editor, I commentate online, Sneeg was an online PVPer, Angel first introduced herself as a ‘gamer girl’, fuckin’ corny by the way… You think this has something to do with online business? Maybe livestreams, or recording shit?” Ted hums.

Joko stares at him for a second.

“Ted, you- you kind of make sense. That’s a bit of a surprise. A lot of shit in here too is technology based, so… It’s all down to one final point. I think you know what I’m saying.” Cooper’s gaze turns to look at Joko.

“…”

“What, you did all that work and you want me to answer? Alright. Fine. Juuust this once. You all were online streamers before this game. That’s what you have in common. Now, because I gave you the answer, I’m shortening your time by thirty minutes. Have fun.” He snorts.

Cooper swallows the lump in his throat and continues.

“So… That’s it. We were streamers before this? Then why-”

Something in Cooper shatters. He swallows again.

If they were streamers beforehand… They never had talents to begin with.

“...I can assume you have the second piece now. Well, in case none of you can read minds, this talent system was fake! A placebo! These bullshit talents never existed! They were put in your head to fuck with you, and boy did I have fun making you think you were special. The only one here with a legitimate ‘talent’ is Schlatt. This sucker did all the dirty work for me!” Joko cackles.

Cooper exhales shakily and looks Joko right in the eye.

“But it wasn’t you.” He says quietly.

Joko looks at him, the same smug expression on his face.

“Pardon me?”

“It wasn’t you who hired Schlatt. It wasn’t you! You aren’t the real mastermind! You were brought in after being used as a decoy to get me and a few others to join your stupid game! You’re a fake!” Cooper yells, pointing a finger at Joko.

He smiles nervously, hands shaky as he clenches them.

“T-Third piece. I didn’t expect you to get this far.”

He chuckles deeply and throws his hands up.

“Well? What more do you want from me, huh? You cracked the case, Cooper! Woo hoo, great for you! You little shit, you saw right through me! I bet it was those tapes, huh? Those idiots don’t know how to cut footage, do they? Pheh! How ironic, considering y-”

A gunshot.

Blood seeps through Joko’s shirt. He rocks a bit in his place before falling onto his side.

Behind him, someone steps out from the darkness. Cooper’s stomach drops. He can hear Ted gasp.

It’s them. The real mastermind.

And finally, the show can begin.

good morning [Video]

PART 3: GOOD MORNING, COOPER

»»————- ☠ ————-««

“C-Carson-?!” Cooper hollers.

“Holy shit… You- You fuckin’ madman...” Ted refuses to look into Carson’s eyes.

“Carson- You- Carson, your fuckin’ face- did th-”

“The bomb? Yeah, you didn’t think I got away completely unharmed, did you? That bomb really went off, you know! Obliterated the whole studio, too… And poor old me, the side of my face! Gyehah!” The mastermind cackles, clutching the scarred side of his face.

“...Prince Zuko lookin’ headass.” Poke mumbles.

“What was that?”

“I said, Prince Zuko lookin’ ass! You expect me to cower in fear of you, you big fuckin’ oaf? Huh?! I thought you were dead! We all thought you were dead, and everyone here believed that! So what do we do now, scream in terror? No! We’re just incredibly fuckin’ confused!” He slams his hands on the podium.

Carson stares at the editor in question, and just laughs. The chorus of high pitched robots laughing echoes him. Cooper’s head hurts.

“Funny! Funny, I am so glad you were kept alive.” He pretends to wipe a tear from his eye.

“So- So what now? Are you just gonna fuck with us? What the hell was Joko going on about? And… And why the hell did he say script, huh-?” Angel yells.

Carson stops smiling. He looks over at Angel, any trace of emotion gone in his face. He opens his mouth and says something Cooper doesn’t think he can wipe from his brain.

“...Because nothing you think is real. What you believe yourself to be is not real. All you really are is something people want you to be.”

The comedian continues to grin sadistically, and gestures a hand upwards. On the screen, several previous streams began playing, all recorded by the survivors themselves.

“This game was more so a social experiment. How warped do you think a person’s view of someone can become, hm? I put this to the test. You’re all aware that you were streamers, yes? You all had quite a big fanbase. Including me! Yes, including me.” He hold back a laugh. Cooper looks over to see Schlatt in a state of complete shock.

“I decided to do something big. To do something nobody will ever forget.” His smile grows impossibly larger.

“What if these warped versions of yourself… Were yourself? I spiraled, trying to figure this out myself. Well, I had done it, after months of planning. What better way to put a personality in someone’s head then to take what’s been given by fans and put it in your head? It took a while to perfect, but I had managed to wipe almost any traces of your former self, and instead twist yourself around to a point where you’re almost someone else entirely! The fans love you!” Carson stops to breathe, inhaling sharply and laughing.

“...Just what in the hell is WRONG with you?! I didn’t sign up for this! I didn’t! You can’t fucking do this to me-!! What am I now, huh? What in the hell did you do to me!” Schlatt shrieks.

“Your cryptic ass needs to get booted. You- You torment me for days, you give me this information I can’t say, and now I don’t even remember who I actually am-?! You- You asshole! I don’t even know why Charlie wanted to work with you!” Cooper barks.

“Ah, Cooper. Who said he wanted to? That isn’t the point. Stubborn, stubborn Cooper. I had the hardest time trying to rework you. It’s kind of funny, really…”

“Considering you were the one that wanted to do this in the first place.”

Cooper’s mouth goes dry.

Wanted to do this..? Since when?

When has he ever wanted to work with Carson in something like this?

“Just what in the hell are you going on about!” Ted yells, now staring down Carson with a darkened expression.

“I mean… That I’m just the accomplice.”

“Cooper’s the mastermind you’re looking for. I’m just his right hand man in this project.”

Cooper’s eyes go wide. Him..? Do this? All of this? He couldn’t, he would never…

“You’re bullshitting! You’re the bastard behind this, and you aren’t getting away with this-!!” Ryan yells.

“Would you like proof? I can see you’re all begging to strangle me right now for this accusation, so allow me to elaborate.”

The TVs previously displaying past streams now go dark, except for one. This one only displays audio. Audio of Carson and Cooper.

“This’ll be the best thing I think you’ve thought of. They all went down quick, too. The process is almost done as well. This’ll be a hit!”

“You really think so…”

“Of course I do, Cooper, I’ve gone this far with this idea.”

“This’ll be fun. I’m a genius, aren’t I!”

“Sure… You know, you never actually tried this on yourself, have you?”

“What… What do you mean?”

“I mean, I need a pair of eyes in there. Schlatt’s just the dirty work. I’ll see if I can find another one to look out for me, but you’re the final piece to this puzzle. Come here, Cooper.”

“You can’t- You can’t do that to me! You can’t!”

“Of course I can! After all, we both go down together with this. ‘Til death do us part! Oh, don’t give me that look.”

“You can’t, stop it, stop it-!!”

“Hold still.”

The TV buzzes to a stop and shuts off.

Everyone turns to look at Cooper with varying degrees of shock, sadness, and rage.

Carson only tilts his head and chuckles.

“The fourth and final piece. Now, friends, I have a deal to make.”

PART 4

»»————- ☠ ————-««

“Cooper-!! I fuckin’ knew it, you snake!”

“I- I refuse to believe that, he’s manipulating all of you!”

“...How come I didn’t see this coming?”

The words and accusations of the remaining survivors filled Cooper’s heads as he attempts to process Carson’s statement.

He… He was behind this? Behind everything? He wiped his friend’s memories, he’s the reason that everyone was here? How everyone was dead?

His head hurts. Everything starts aching, and more tears bubble at the corner of his eyes. His teeth chatter. He feels like vomiting.

How could he have done this..?

“Mm… Seems like you’re all still lost. Maybe you want me to explain more?” Carson cocks his head. The robot next to him mimics him.

“Kindly.” Angel deadpans, arms crossed.

“Weeeell, since you asked so nicely.” Carson chuckles.

“To put it simply… You aren’t you. Sure, you were you, but thanks to your fans, not anymore. All over the internet, people loved you. Idolized you. They associated things with you.They boiled you down to nothing but simplistic, overinflated traits. I saw entertainment in this. All I, or rather, Cooper, did, was take your memories and completely erase them! Fucked around in your brains and they completely vanished! All that was left was what they wanted you to be.” Carson finishes with that same face splitting grin.

“...So that’s what this is about? Taking us and- and using us like toys? Is that it? Is that what they think of us as? Fucking- playthings-?!” Angel barks.

“Hey, be glad I didn’t listen to the people who wanted you to smooch-”

“You think this is fucking funny?! People are dying because of some sick social experiment! And- And Cooper did all of this? You know what you’re implying, Carson? That- That Cooper would indirectly kill his best friend like that-” Angel slams her fist on the podium, but Carson shoots her a look.

“Don’t interrupt me. And who said they were best friends? The fans think they’re two halves of the same whole. I just gave them what they want.” Carson shrugs.

“Gave them what they want..?” Cooper asks quietly.

Carson looks at the blonde pointedly.

He smiles, and points upwards again. The TVs switch on. On the screen, several posts online began to scroll across the TV. All over, posts praising the game would pop up. Remarkably, they would be accumulated in mostly on one website, with posts ranging in the hundreds supporting the game and the survivors.

Cooper looks up at the TVs in complete despair.

“Incredible, right? Lots of support, lots of criticism… Such is life! Nobody will ever truly agree, it seems.” Carson sighs, a hand over the unburned side of his face.

“And it was AAAAALL Cooper’s idea! Pfff- hahaha! Can you believe it? Wooooow. Alright, time for the deal.”

Caron grins, and the TVs turn off once more. Angel goes to say something once more but ultimately stops as a spotlight turns on, drifting down onto Carson. He bows his head, and it shades his face just enough to send a shiver down Cooper’s spine.

“Two options. Two options between what’s truly right and wrong. On your podium you’ll find a white button and a black button. The white button means that you will vote to kill Cooper and keep yourself alive. Cooper, the true mastermind, the one that put you here in the first place. Cooper, your friend.”

The podiums light up, and on the voting screen is a white button.

“The black button means you kill me. You shoot the messenger. I die, and you have to figure your way out of here. I won’t just give you the answer. If you aren’t able to find a way out of here, then you’ll stay here under the guidance of the robots. It’ll take a month before the generators, the robots, everything shuts down. Shoot the messenger, and if you can’t find your way out in a month, you’ll be trapped.”

The black button lights up.

“Here’s the catch. Here’s the fun part. It must be unanimous, and you cannot tell anyone your vote. If everyone agrees on one option, then that option will happen. If so much as one person votes the opposite, then that person will be executed. Both Cooper and I will be executed. ‘Til death do us p-”

“Shut the fuck up! Just shut up! I’m not apart of your game anymore! I’m not! If I can’t remember a thing, then why- why am I being held accountable for something I didn’t fucking do?” Cooper yells.

“You told me specifically before you erased your own memories. Funny, how the brain works.” Carson sighs.

“You… You could be lying.”

“Mm. Smart. Anyways, Cooper, you want to take the floor as to why they shouldn’t send you out to slaughter?” Carson asks, honeyed.

“…”

“Yeah. Yeah, I do.”

Cooper straightens his back and grips the podium. With every nervous breath, he can still feel the scar over his lip. That damned monkey…

He can do this. He can do this for everyone. Keep himself alive and get everyone out. He can do this.

“...C-Carson. You dropped this bombshell on us out of the blue after revealing yourself as the mastermind. I may have set up the game, but you’re the one running it. I gave you the puppet, but you’re the one pulling the strings. Does that make sense? It better fucking make sense. Because I can’t have this shit thrown on me and immediately be seen as the bad guy. I’m- I’m not the bad guy. I’m not the mastermind. I’m not the one forcing you to be here.”

“You may not be forcing us to be here, but you know what? You’re the one that planted that seed, dude! You’re the one that started this! You put us here, you- you forced us to forget everything.” Poke yells.

“I- I know-!! But that’s not me. Not anymore, thanks to myself. God, that’s confusing. But- But my point is that if I were truly the mastermind right now, I would have let everyone go ages ago. I wouldn’t have let any of this happen. I- I wouldn’t have let Gold, or Wilbur, or Charlie, or Ty, or- or Connor and Altrive, Travis, anyone! Fucking anyone! I wouldn’t let anyone die! I’m not going to let anyone die anymore! The only person here that should be getting punished is Carson!” Cooper points a finger at the mastermind, who just cocks an eyebrow.

“…”

“Fun. One more thing I forgot to mention, you know.” Carson deadpans and rolls his eyes. Cooper’s case goes completely ignored by the mastermind.

The TVs flicker on, revealing polls, and the same posts online.

“Tell your sob story to the audience and see how they feel.” He winks.

Ted looks down at his podium, to Cooper, to Carson, to the TV, and back to his podium in confusion.

“So- So these fans are voting, too?” He asks.

“Yeah! I figured ‘cause they adore you and all, they would love to decide who gets to die! Isn’t that something?”

Cooper only hopes that his case didn’t entirely go unheard.

ENDING [BLACK]

»»————- ☠ ————-««

[YOU CHOSE: BLACK]

It’s safe to say that the fans went wild.

Carson looks up at the TVs in pure glee, the eye on the burned side of his face glinting menacingly. Cooper looks at him, really studies him, and shudders. Every corner, every inch of Carson was cold and full of malice. This was a man that didn’t care if he lived or died. This was a man who only wanted to bring one thing.

This was a man who only wanted despair, for himself and for others.

Cooper looks down at his podium, and looks at the others choosing their respective answers. Ryan’s hand hovers shakily over the white button. Cooper doesn’t say a thing.

Cooper presses the black button. He doesn’t want anyone dying, but if it means stopping the game, he’ll do anything to get his friends out.

His friends. Are they really his friends?

Carson’s face shifts from one of glee to one of confusion. Cooper looks to the mastermind, then up at the TVs.

The polls read almost entirely black.

A thousand votes. And almost all of them black.

They really did listen.

He exhales a sigh of relief, and as he looks back at the survivors he feels Carson’s red hot gaze against his neck.

“You… They really believed you? Huh? They want me to die after all, pheheh…”

His eyes trail to the floor. He looks almost defeated. Upset.

Quickly, his expression changed, and he jolts back up, hands on his hips and a sick grin plastered on his face like before.

“Huahahaha! You idiot! You stupid, stupid idiot! You can’t kill me that easily! Wrong fuckin’ choice! Hahaha! You seem to forget Schlatt works for me! He has to! Gyehahaha!”

The mastermind points at Schlatt, who just grimaced, lips pulled back in an angry snarl.

“Hehaha! I had him vote against you! I had him vote for your death! He has to! He fucking has to, the damn grunt! Noooow, you get to die! Hehaha! The lowly protagonist finally gets karma back at him! What a champ! What a show!”

Carson throws his hands up again, and all TVs shut off except for one. He fishes into his pocket for a remote, and displays the votes.

“You see? Huahaha! Say goodnight, Cooper! We get to go down together, you and me, just like I planned!”

Ryan looks at the screen, then back at Carson. He smirks.

“...You might want to check again.”

Carson does a double take and looks at the screen. His eyes widen.

“What... the fuck.”

“...At least I did one good thing before I have to go out.” Schlatt growls.

All of the votes were for black.

Schlatt didn’t vote for Cooper.

They win.

Carson stares at the TV in dismay, deflated and full of rage.

“See that? I don’t have to fucking listen to you anymore. Neither does Cooper. Neither does anyone else, you sick man. I broke my deal, so what are you gonna do now? Kill me? Don’t you have anything better to do? I terrorized these bitches, I did what you wanted me to do, and

you’re the one getting the karma. You can take me down with you, but you keep these guys out of your despair.” Schlatt laments, hands gripped to the podium.

“I don’t have to do what you want me to do. I- I did some bad things. I’m the reason Travis is dead, the reason Connor’s dead. Hell, I even told Wilbur that Charlie had connections to the mastermind. I caused four people’s deaths here. I’m probably as bad as Carson to you now. They’re gone now, but nobody has to leave anymore. Nobody has to die now. Karma’s a bitch, innit? I’m getting what I deserve, and so does he.” He approaches Carson slowly, who stares at Schlatt in fear.

“Ladies and gentlemen, I’m going to die because I didn’t follow his orders. I’m not scared. You know what I did? I avoided the fate you wanted most for us, Carson. I stopped you. I threw myself under the bus to keep you from hurting anyone anymore. You’re powerless.” Schlatt stalks forward, but stops to look at Cooper.

“Cooper. The exit to this game is through the morgue. There’s an entrance under the freezer that nobody ever seemed to find. If you feel around, there's a lever. Open it, go into the morgue, and there should be a tunnel. Go into the tunnel, make a right, and leave. Do not look back.” He instructs.

“The freezer..? Charlie’s still in there, you know.” Poke mumbles. Schlatt nods quietly.

“I’m going to say this once. I’m sorry, everyone. You don’t need to forgive me for the things I’ve done.” Schlatt stares down the survivors cooly, calmly.

Schlatt then turns to Carson with an expression one can only describe as a feeling of raw hate. Of someone so enraged, they’re willing to die to get back at someone. And that’s exactly what he’s doing.

“Game over, Carson King.”

Schlatt throws a punch right into Carson as the wall opens up behind them, a chain shooting out to grab their ankles. The pair are dragged off, Carson with a shriek and Schlatt with a powerful yell.

The TVs all flicker on, and Carson, ironically is found back on the same stage he supposedly died on.

On a few other TVs is Schlatt, presented standing eerily still with a look of regret across his face. His back is flat against the wall, and his arms are cuffed to the wall.

Carson shakes with anger as he’s presented with a microphone stand. He grabs the stand and tosses it off the stage into the empty audience, clutching the mic.

Schlatt closes his eyes and folds his hands together, awaiting his demise. A spotlight shines on him, and he opens an eye. A small red dot is trained on his chest.

Carson begins spitting jumbled nonsense into the microphone, yelling about despair, about how Cooper should die with him. He says something about Travis and something twinges in Cooper's heart.

More red dots begin appearing on Schlatt, lighting up and training on his chest, his arms, his stomach, anything. He inhales sharply as he realizes what's going to happen.

Carson's hands clam up as he grows more nervous. Where's the execution? Did they not plan it out? Why isn't he dead yet? As if on cue with his thoughts, a sandbag drops from the ceiling. Carson looks down at his feet. A small loop of rope is loosely wrapped around his ankle.

Schlatt shuts his eyes again and straightens his posture, sighing. Dignity. He goes out with dignity.

Another sandbag drops. And another. As the fourth sandbag drops, the rope tightens around his ankle. Carson's dragged back and up quickly, and is suspended above the stage by his ankles. His arms flail, looking around. In the back row of the audience, Carson spots several tomatoes. Is this it? A callback to his fake out? Great..

"...If you're going to kill me, take me out in one shot. Overkill is for cowards." Schlatt calls out. Nobody answers. A sharp pain comes from his thigh. He looks down, and a small spike had jutted out from the wall and impaled his thigh. So that's what the dots are for.

Carson yells in frustration as the first tomato hits. Not a bomb, but just as humiliating. The tomatoes hit him at a fast pace, and he spits out juice as one hits him square in the mouth. Disgusting. He blinks tomato out of his eye and groans. He can hear rustling behind the curtain.

More spiles behind to impale Schlatt in nonfatal areas, the traitor so much as not uttering a word. A spike goes through his hand. He says nothing but grunts in pain.

The tomatoes stopped hitting him, thankfully, but Carson arches his head to spot what was happening. The curtains behind him rustle.

Without warning,

A spike pierces Schlatt's chest.

A large object comes from behind and pierces Carson's stomach, going through and skewering him.

Schlatt says nothing. He gurgles out blood, holds his head high, and goes limp.

Carson thrashes wildly, coughing and sputtering blood. He yells, screams, flails. Nothing to move the object. He looks up shakily, vision blurred, to find the object to be the head of the robotic swordfish.

“G-Gyehahaha! Haha! Ohoho! You- You’ll never g-get rid of me, Cooper! Never! You’ll always remember me! Hehahaha! Hehah… Hah… What- What a joke… Ha…”

Carson goes limp. The mastermind and his traitor finally die.

Cooper blinks away the surprise, shock, and even the tears from his eyes. The TVs shut off. The lights go back on. Ted, Angel, Poke, and Ryan all stare at him with varying degrees of confusion and shock.

“...T-The game’s over.” Ted whispers quietly.

“We- We can go home. We can go home!” Angel smiles.

Cooper doesn’t say anything. He doesn’t think he can.

They can finally go home.

EPILOGUE [BLACK]

»»————- ☠ ————-««

The survivors all stare off in what can only be described as confusion and disbelief. Cooper looks down at his hands and flexes them once, twice, and looks at the blood still embedded in his nail beds.

What really bewildered him is, was, the sheer contrast between Carson and Schlatt. A cheap, copout excuse of a villain and a powerful, twisted mastermind. Everything about Schlatt seemed forced, a forced smug smile, acting this evil as if a man was twisting his arm to do it.

In a way, he was. Schlatt wasn’t acting on his own accord. It seems that his death was the only autonomous thing he had done here all along.

Everything Schlatt has ever done here felt connected, cold and calculated. The Schlatt that these people wanted him to be. In his last moments, Cooper feels, he can see what he was. Under all of that precise sadism that was reprogrammed into his head, Cooper sees the

courageous and selfless aspects. A man that just wanted to help everyone the only way he knew how.

Carson, on the other hand. Carson felt so… angry. A once kind and gentle man spiraled into appeasing a fanbase. That could've been any of them, Cooper thinks. Carson was angry, he was angry and sad and driven into madness with trying to please a crowd. Desperate. This isn't the real Carson, Cooper thinks. The real Carson was still there, but buried. Maybe they had a chance to save that...

No. The villains are defeated, the heroes win, just like any story would end. What now, he thinks. The only thing left to do is escape.

Escape.

He looks up at Ted, who was still computing their victory. A man who had been confusing and intimidating and silent. Quieter, he had gotten. The game had gotten to him, in some ways.

Ryan sits there in that wheelchair Cooper inadvertently condemned him to, talking to Angel excitedly about the world after this. Ryan was afraid. He had endured almost too much for someone to bare. It was concerning, almost. What surprised Cooper the most was how he bounced back. He's nervous, but knows what to say. He's solid. He's a foundation nobody knows they needed.

Angel, oh Angel. Cooper doesn't know what to say. He hadn't grown that close to her, but she had saved his ass a plethora of times. She's assertive and knowledgeable, but Cooper still doesn't know why she lied about the talent placebo, though. The gamer girl schtick was corny. The hair on the back of his neck raises when he looks at her smile. She knows more than she lets on, but maybe it's not her. Maybe, it's her somewhere deep down. The real Angel.

Poke stands there silently, ironic for a man so vocal about situations. Cooper doesn't know what to think about him. He's considerably amusing. He could be passionate, could be intense, could be antagonizing or quietly observing. His presence is about as confusing as Ted's. He feels as if he has no choice but to respect him. One thing for sure, the editor's genuine. That, he can admire.

"...Well? You gonna stand there looking at us, or are you gonna get us out of here, Cooper?" Poke, on cue, scoffs.

Cooper blinks himself out of his head and nods. To the freezer, flip the lever, to the morgue, down the hall to the right. Let's hope Schlatt was right.

Cooper starts off the to the cafeteria, and Ted follows closely behind him. Ryan follows after him, and Poke trails behind with Angel. The group walks quietly into the room, and occasionally Cooper will hear Ted mutter something inaudible behind him.

Cooper walks into the kitchen and is faced with the freezer once again. He swallows the building lump in his throat and grips the handle tightly. Something flashes in the back of his eyes when he blinks. Charlie's frozen corpse. He swallows again and pushes it down, opening the metal freezer door.

He props it open and looks in. The freezer had thankfully been shut off, but Cooper's met with the smell of spoiled food and meats. He can hear someone gag behind him and he winces. He peeks in and spots a wooden crate to the side of the wall. He grabs the crate and props open the door, sliding the crate in as a door stopper.

"Um. One at a time."

"Ladies first."

"Shut the hell up, Poke!"

"Guys, my chair…"

Ted looks at Ryan, and looks back at Cooper.

Moments later, Ryan is slinged over Ted's shoulder, with Poke clutching Ryan's folded wheelchair.

"...Uh. Thank you, Ted." Ryan mutters quietly.

"Yeah. Let's hope I don't drop you." He chuckles.

Cooper steps into the freezer first, and feels around the wall for a lightswitch. He finds one, and flicks it on. No luck. Someone must have turned the freezer's power off.

He walks further into the freezer, feeling around the walls for a lever. He almost trips over something, but remains upright. He looks down to see a defrosted bag of fries. Hm. He looks around on the floor with the light given from the kitchen. Charlie's body is gone. It's been gone. He can faintly see a blood stain on the floor, and a small ring of ice on the floor as if someone was frozen to the floor. His heart drops a bit, heavy with guilt. Poor dude. He'll be sure to say goodbye to him in the morgue.

He continues to feel up against the wall, and once pushing away a few stacked crates, he exposes a small black lever.

"Guys, I- I found it."

Cooper grabs it and flips it, and a small panel in the wall lights up a light blue. It moves backwards and opens like a door, swinging on its hinges. It came up to around Cooper's chest, but someone like Ted might need to duck a little more than Cooper.

"Holy shit… This is straight out of a sci-fi movie." Ryan calls out from Ted's shoulder.

Cooper marches ahead, ducking underneath the small overhead, and is met with a small, skinny hallway. A few feet down the hallway is a small staircase equally as small as the hallway, with the stair lighting up with a cool, light blue hue.

Cooper ushers in Ted with Ryan, and he starts descending the stairs with the construction planner in tow. Angel comes next, and she heads down. Poke struggles with the wheelchair, but ultimately makes it in with a few complaints. The chair clunks around in the skinny hallway, and Poke almost trips down the stairs. Cooper goes down last after making sure Poke didn't break his neck lugging the chair down.

He follows the editor down in silence, and the hallway fills with idle chatter from the remaining survivors. Cooper's about twenty stairs down when he finally feels a cool chill fill the staircase. They're reaching the morgue, he thinks.

The cold continues nipping at him, and he pulls his hoodie closer into himself.

The group finally reach the end of the staircase, and their descent downwards greets them with a clean, sterile morgue setting lit up the same light blue hue, however dulled. There are a couple tables of medical equipment, shelves of different books, a shower, and a few body trays in the wall. A drawer is opened up from the wall, and Cooper can see a small pale hand. He shudders.

"Jesus, this place is scary. You sure there's an exit through here?" Ted mutters.

"Yeah. Through that door, I can assume." Angel points off to the wall.

A large black door is propped open with a door stopper, and inside is a dimly lit hallway.

Cooper can hear a door open from behind him and he whips around, fist raised. Ted turns around, wary of Ryan, and Poke and Angel start to yell threats to whatever, or whoever was coming out from a wooden door placed under the staircase.

"Whoa-! I- I wasn't expecting visitors, uh, so soon, too. The game's over, right?"

There in the doorway, swaddled in a large white lab coat, wringing a pair of robotic appendages nervously, is Charlie.

Charlie, the man previously thought to have died in the freezer.

Cooper almost faints on the spot.

“C-Charlie?! Holy shit, we- we thought you were dead!” Angel yells.

“Yeah! Wait- you aren’t- this isn’t like what Carson pulled, right? You aren’t some big bad mastermind, right?” Ted squints.

“Huh? No, actually. Sure, I- I kinda sold out to Carson, but I didn’t want to, you know! The first night I was here, he just kinda showed up in my room and went ‘okay, get information on these people or I’ll kill you. now fake your death’. Crazy, right?” He chuckles, anxiety dripping from every word he spoke.

“I… Well, can you at least explain yourself?” Cooper asks.

“Oh, gladly. So, uh, I almost died from hypothermia. That’s not- uh- not a good thing. I guess because Carson wanted me to work for him, he saved me..? My hands were all fucked, though. Like, no saving them. He got rid of them, because they were so frostbitten. Now I got sick ass robot hands. I’m like the Terminator, dude!”

“...Can we put him back in the freezer.” Poke deadpans.

“Jeez, no need to be so cold.” Charlie pouts. Cooper almost chuckles.

“Great. So you’ve been hiding out here?” Ryan asks.

“Well, kinda. I’ve been managing the bodies down here, and I’ve been in charge of the infirmary, too. When Ryan was out cold, I was the one fixing him up. You know, seeing him like that broke my heart.” He sighs.

“Well! Uh, anyways, I guess because the game’s over now, I get to go home! That was part a’ the deal, anyways. You guys kill Carson, I go home.” Charlie shrugs and springs to the door.

“C’mon! According to Carson, we’re somewhere in San Diego, California, so…”

“California-?! I live in New York!” Ted yelps in surprise.

“Well, ain’t that a damn shame, Teddy. C’mon! I’ve been dying to get out of here… Get it. Because I’m in charge of the morgue.”

Poke groans, but follows Charlie anyways. The group begins to follow after the makeshift coroner, the dim hallway echoing through the morgue. Cooper lags behind, however, and looks around the morgue.

He heads to the body trays, first and foremost.

He searches for a name, a specific name, and once finding him, pulls the drawer out from the wall. He doesn't bother taking off the cover on the body.

"..."

"Hey, Travis." He mumbles hoarsely.

"...I never got to apologize, you know. I- I never got to say sorry. I didn't get to say sorry for letting this happen to you. I- I couldn't save you like everyone else. You shouldn't have- have died. It should have been me. You- I know you hurt someone. You'd probably tell me right now that you deserve this, and that I shouldn't be upset over this, and that I c-currently shouldn't be crying over your dead fucking body."

He stops to take a breath.

"...I'm sorry, man. I'm a fucking wreck. You told me not to be upset, and I can't even do that for you. Look on the bright side, though! We did it."

He smiles.

"We did it, Travis. We finally got the mastermind. It's over, dude. I- We- Y- We can finally go."

His chin quivers.

"...Cooper? You need another minute, or-?" Charlie peeks his head through the door.

Cooper looks up and wipes the tears out of his eyes.

"...No, I'm coming."

Charlie gives a nod and a sympathetic look.

"I need to go, Travis, but- but I'm never going to forget you. Never, not anymore. Nobody will be in my head anymore, and nobody's gonna make me forget you."

"I'll see you sometime, Trav."

Cooper pushes the body tray back in, and straightens his back, he heads to the door and slowly steps foot into the hallway. About ten feet ahead is the rest of the survivors, including Charlie, waiting.

Cooper gives a smile and clears his throat.

“Let’s get a move on.”

The group move down the hallway, and Cooper follows after. Charlie says a pun, and the group ripples with laughter.

Cooper’s further down the hallway when he turns around to look at that place of demise one last time.

He swears, he swears he can see someone with curly hair looking back at him, giving a small little wave as he leaves.

He waves back this time.

ENDING [WHITE]

»»————- ☠ ————-««

It’s safe to say that the fans went wild.

Carson looks up at the TVs in pure glee, the eye on the burned side of his face glinting menacingly. Cooper looks at him, really studies him, and shudders. Every corner, every inch of Carson was cold and full of malice. This was a man that didn’t care if he lived or died. This was a man who only wanted to bring one thing.

This was a man who only wanted despair, for himself and for others.

Cooper looks down at his podium, and looks at the others choosing their respective answers. Ryan’s hand hovers shakily over the white button. Cooper doesn’t say a thing.

Cooper presses the black button. He doesn’t want anyone dying, but if it means stopping the game, he’ll do anything to get his friends out.

His friends. Are they really his friends?

Carson’s face lights up more so than it already was. Cooper looks to the mastermind, then up at the TVs.

A rock hits the bottom of his stomach

The polls read white.

The only vote for black was for Cooper.

And while the fans seemed to want Cooper to live, to defeat the mastermind and get him and his friends out alive, Carson didn't listen to them.

He didn't bother listening to them.

"...Hohoho. Hohohoahahaha! AAAAHAHAHA! You did it, Cooper! Phehahaha! Wow! You fucked up so haaard!"

Cooper feels sick. So, so sick. Tears well at the corners of his eyes.

He thought he had done it. He had convinced them, didn't he? Somewhere, he feels, somewhere, Carson got what he deserved.

"G-Guys…"

"Don't say anything, Cooper." Schlatt stops him.

Cooper looks at the businessman, who's hand was still shakily on the white button.

"..."

Cooper's soul practically plummets out of his body. The blood drains from his face. More tears press at his eyes.

He practically folds in on himself. He hugs himself tight, but his face looks almost entirely blank.

"Cooper… I- I'm sorry. It had to be done. I trusted you. I trusted you, and it turns out you're the one that did this to us? I can't live with myself knowing I let you live." Ted's face darkens. His presence makes Cooper's insides turn, and Cooper finally feels just how intimidating he can be.

"Phahahaha! Man, it's even better, because this is just how I planned it! Gyehahaha! This means that I get to die with him! I die, knowing that I get to win. I win!" Carson throws his head back and practically squeals.

"..."

"I… I can't believe it." Cooper says just above a whisper.

He's… Over. The one thing he's worked for, getting everyone out alive, and he's failed. He lost.

Is this how Wilbur felt? Alone and scared, thinking he did something right? Did he die for naught? Did he die scared, or did he just let go? Was he angry when getting accused?

Altrive, was he feeling just as horrible as Cooper is now? He was angry, he was upset. Was he sick? Sick of being accused, sick of Ty? He doesn't know. Cooper can feel bile burning his throat.

Travis… He was so hopeful. He was accepting of his fate, he was worried, he wanted Cooper, he wanted him to come save him. It was almost pathetic. It felt forced, how close he was to him. It felt forced upon him, but he can't help but let hot tears roll down and off of his face at the thought of seeing the last bit of warmth drain from his eyes.

Sneeg was so angry. He had a reason Cooper still can't even think around. Kill Techno, for what? To prove a point? Maybe he didn't have access to Schlatt when planning a murder. Maybe he went for Techno as an excuse to rack up his kill count. Either way, Sneeg made a point. He could see everyone was a little more afraid after his execution. Nothing special, nothing flashy. A boring death for someone that tried to take out the number one. Carson's biased, he thinks.

All of them. Every single one, he had a hand in killing.

And finally, he thinks, karma finally caught up to him.

He has nothing to say.

All he does is bury his face in his hands. Static explodes behind his eyes as he squeezes them shut, hard. This was it. He was done for. He failed.

"...I'm so sorry." He chokes out between sobs.

"...Are you going to at least argue? Even though it's already set, I would have at least expected someone like you to rebound one last time." Angel says. Cooper can hear her voice dripping in pity.

"He's speechless. I think we broke him." Ryan says quietly.

"Weeeeell? Is that it? Cooper and I, off to the slaughterhouse! Hohohaha! Pathetiiiic!"

Cooper looks up from his hands, eyes sparked with sorrow and hatred.

"...I- I guess you're all right. I have no defense anymore. I… I lose. Ted, Angel, Schlatt, Ryan, I- please forgive me. Please. Please stay safe, I don't want anyone else to die, please get out safe, please!"

A chain shoots out from opposite sides of the hall. The usual panels on the wall open up, and Carson looks at Cooper with a sadistic grin.

“Game over, Cooper!”

Cooper looks around one more time at his friends’ faces. All reflecting the same emotions of surprise and sadness. Schlatt, however, he looks to be full of regret.

The chain jerks him back, and he falls to the floor as him and Carson are jerked back.

Carson is dragged back into the same stage as before, grinning wildly. A collar is present on his neck, a deep red color with a green blinking light on the front of it. The red curtain behind him is closed, and the microphone in front of him is placed on a stand. He grabs the stand, takes the mic from it, and tosses it into the audience.

Cooper is thrown into a small room with a screen. He wiggles his arms to find them chained to the wall behind him, and upon looking at the screen in front of him, the light from it illuminates a message written in dried blood on the wall next to him. ‘TIL DEATH DO US PART.’ Great. That stupid fucking line again. What bothers him is the collar around his neck, black and white with a green light blinking on it.

Carson laughs into the microphone, throwing his hand wildly into the air as he screams about the game, about Cooper, about the survivors.

Cooper can do nothing but watch. The collar aches around his neck, heavy and restraining. It doesn’t help he’s still choked up about his impending doom.

Carson tells a joke about killing Gold. The audience remains silent. Carson starts booing the audience. No tomatoes are thrown, and the silence bugs Cooper.

Cooper’s breathing picks up as he thinks. Will it hurt? Is there really an afterlife? What’ll happen to the others? What would the real Cooper do right now, not the one with the fucked up memories and fake personality?

Something behind the curtain rustles as Carson slows down his manic rambling. He grins, turning around. Something sharp pokes out of the curtain.

Cooper can only watch in anticipation. He tugs at his chains. He tugs harder, harder, and starts kicking, too. He starts thrashing, twisting around and flailing, screaming. Screaming in fear, in sorrow, in rage, in absolute rage. This isn’t the real Carson, he thinks. He hates this Carson.

Carson turns to the audience, and shoots a bone chilling grin out into the camera from which Cooper was getting the live feed from.

“I bet you’ll enjoy this, huh? Seeing the big bad villain finally die? You know more than you let on, you know. I know exactly what you’re thinking. Schlatt’s still alive, isn’t he? He did horrible things, but if he were to die, you would be upset. Cooper is going to die, your strong and reliable protagonist, your true mastermind, and you’re probably sooo upset right now. I can see your face, and it’s so funny to me! Keep this in mind, that in a way, they aren’t real. Neither am I. I’m just a villain after all, and it seems that that’s all I’ll ever be to you.”

Something clicks behind Carson. He grins. Cooper’s breathing picks up as he watches the screen.

“It’s showtime!”

A large skewer-like rod shoots out quickly from behind the curtain, and Carson’s breath hitches. He looks down. A harpoon. He’d been harpooned.

He looks back up at the camera with an intense fire behind his eyes. Blood dribbles out from the side of his mouth. He squeezes his mouth shut, and then vomits out blood. His collar starts beeping quickly, before the light turns red.

“Goodnight, Cooper.”

The collar tightens, and Cooper can hear metal unsheathing from it. Spikes. Spikes in the collar. Carson’s neck had been impaled, and he shakily falls to his knees before keeling over to the side.

Cooper’s eyes widen. He lets out a scream, a raw scream filled with fear as his collar begins to beep. The light turns red.

Sharp, burning pain from everywhere. He can’t breathe.

He can’t breathe.

He lets out a pathetic squeal as the last of his air leaves his lungs, eyes spilling over warm tears.

Blood fills his mouth, fills his nose and drips down his face. Blood gurgles out of his mouth, and he holds his head high before going limp.

Everything goes spotty, before Cooper’s vision finally goes black.

EPILOGUE [WHITE]

»»————- ☠ ————-««

…

…

…

“...I wish you weren’t here right now.” He says.

He already knows this. He shouldn’t have died. He lost.

“You- You weren’t supposed to go like that, you were supposed to live, man.”

He doesn’t say anything back.

He only pouts and scrunches up further, staring off into the sea of white surrounding the two of them.

He had died. The collar went off, and his neck… his poor neck, punctured on every side.

Funny, he didn’t think there was an afterlife.

But there is, and here he is, sitting next to someone.

He thinks back, spacing out. The person next to him doesn’t say anything further, and they sit next to him.

What are they doing now? His friends?

He would likely want Angel to lead them. Get them out of there alive. She seemed reliable enough, like she knows what she’s doing. Cooper shudders a bit. She knows a lot, she’s smart, and saved his ass plenty of times in trials. She has to have gotten them out.

He didn’t want to become some kind of leader. It just happened. From the moment he woke up, something deep in his head programmed him to simply be that way. Carson decided it would be fun to make him the center of everything.

The center of everything, the center of everyone’s problems. Looking back, he really was the problem. By being the metaphorical head of the table, he became a magnet for problems.

Maybe that's just him. Maybe they wanted him to be like that.

Cooper doesn't feel autonomous anymore. It's like some big, overarching presence whispers into his ear to make him do, make him say.

Monkey see, monkey do.

"...You're thinking too hard." The other person says.

Cooper blinks himself out of his head.

He does that too often. He gets too deep into his head and overthinks, he goes on and on for what feels like forever, his head running through an imaginary script, processing things-

He's doing it again.

Cooper balls himself up tighter and buries his face in his knees. He feels awful. He truly feels awful.

"I missed you, but- but not in the missed you kind of way where I wanted to see you like this." The person says.

Cooper nods slowly.

"I was hoping that, like, this would be fake. That it's all some big VR game, or it's all a dream."

Cooper nods again.

"..."

"..."

"Who killed you, Cooper?" They ask.

Cooper only coughs in response. He lifts his head up and feels around his neck. It's rough and patchy where the spikes went through, likely scars. His hand brushes against his face, and the scars stretching from his chin to his mouth and nose are all healed up better than in the game.

That seems to be the case here. No trauma, at least, no physical trauma.

He inhales shakily and decides to answer.

"Carson." He replies shakily.

The other person looks surprised.

“Carson? I thought he was dead.” They say.

He thought that, too, and at this point, thank whoever he is for real this time.

They say nothing further, and Cooper stares off again. The blank emptiness swims in his eyes, and floating specks dot across his vision. Too white, he thinks. Too blank. He needs to fill it with something.

He looks down at his hands. Clean. They’re clean.

“...Whatever happened with Ryan?” They ask.

“He’s okay, now. He’s in a wheelchair.” He replies.

They stare off in silence again. The person scoots a little closer to Cooper. He doesn’t react.

“...You know, I don’t think Charlie’s dead. I haven’t seen him here. Wilbur keeps asking about him, but I haven’t seen him anywhere.” They hum.

Cooper thinks for a second. That could be plausible. Unless…

“Maybe he’s in hell.”

“I don’t think there’s a hell. I don’t think there’s a heaven, either. I’m pretty sure we’re all just kind of here.” They shrug.

He thinks again. If there really was a hell, he’s pretty sure a murderer wouldn’t be in wherever the hell he is right now.

Cooper unballs himself, and instead opts to spread his legs out in front of him. The person next to him does the same.

“...You wanna go see everyone else, Coop?”

Cooper smiles.

“I… I’d like that, Travis, yeah.”

Travis smiles, albeit a little sadly.

“Great. It’s just a little way away, too. If we just keep walking, we’ll get to them.”

Travis hoists himself up and stretches. He drops a hand down for Cooper, and the latter is pulled up by the former.

“C’mon.”

Travis walks a little bit ahead of the blonde, but he follows nonetheless.

He stares down at the ground. The concept of time must not exist here. Distance might, but then again, it’s all a blank white space.

The next time he looks up, he can see…

Well, everyone.

Gold, Wilbur, Ty, Altrive, Connor, Techno, Sneeg…

Ty and Wilbur notice Cooper first, expressions immediately filling with concern. The rest all turn to look at him, and the air fills with questions

“Cooper? What happened?”

“Cooper-!! Are you okay?”

“I didn’t expect this…”

“Did Schlatt do this?”

“...This is bittersweet.”

Cooper doesn’t say anything back. He doesn’t want to.

His eyes well with tears instead, and as he looks down, he can feel Travis’ hand on his back.

“Give the guy a break. He’s pro’lly overwhelmed! Coop, are you okay?”

Cooper turns to look at Travis. He tries not to look at the rough, scarred patch of skin on his neck.

“Never better, Trav.”

That’s not entirely a lie.